



## How a “Temp MD” Works for My Rural Oncology Practice by Judy Schmidt, MD

*Locum te-nens (noun): Medieval Latin, literally, (one) holding a place; one filling an office for a time or temporarily taking the place of another—used especially of a doctor or clergyman.*

—Merriam Webster Online  
2004

Since 1991, I have been in solo practice as a medical oncologist in Missoula, Mont., (population 65,000). Prior to this, I was in a group practice for three years, but found that I preferred being a solo practitioner. I like knowing all my patients, and I like making all the treatment decisions. I love my work. About seven years ago, however, I was really feeling the time pressure.

The downside to solo practice is the difficulty scheduling time off. I simply could not take time away from my practice. I could not attend meetings. I couldn't schedule a sabbatical. I couldn't even carve out time for a vacation.

With a patient volume of 5,500 patients per year, adding a locum tenens physician (temp MD) to my practice has been a lifesaver. In fact, I'd say it's been an absolute “home run” for my practice.

My locum tenens physician is a full-time employee. I work through Medical Doctor Associates, Inc., (MDA), a medical staffing company headquartered in Atlanta, Ga. that offers locum tenens placement as well as contract and permanent placement. If your practice is considering adding a temp MD to staff, I urge you to work with a locum tenens organization that knows you and your practice and has a solid understanding of your practice needs and what would work well for you. MDA has done this beautifully for me.

I have worked with MDA for about seven years. During this time, I've worked with a number of locum tenens. Basically, my locum tenens firm helps me identify locum physicians and then select the best one after seeing how well the individual works in my clinic. In selecting a locum tenens firm with which to work, I'd suggest identifying the firm that you find the most reliable, and look for a company with a positive, friendly, and caring attitude.

When I hire a locum tenens, I look for the following physician traits: knowledge, compassion, willingness, flexibility, and humility. I employ a locum tenens physician year round, and I work with the director of MDA on the placement. My current locum tenens has been with my practice for four years, and he is very committed to the practice.

Adding a “temp MD” to your practice is a big decision and one that should not be taken lightly. Before adding a prospective locum tenens to your team, I suggest inviting the individual to come in to meet and talk with your practice staff. This interaction gives all parties an opportunity to learn about each other and determine compatibility.

In my experience, communication has been the key. I personally follow-up with my patients and my nurses, and ask directly about their experience with the locum tenens. I also send out a monthly patient newsletter and ask patients for written feedback. Finally, all of my patients know they can call or e-mail me directly about any treatment issues, including concerns about my locum tenens. In the end, it turns out that my patients are very comfortable receiving care from my locum tenens.

Employing a “temp MD” has not only allowed me some flexibility in

### Tips for Hiring a “Temp MD”

- ✓ Work with a locum tenens firm that knows you and your practice.
- ✓ Carefully review the locum tenens CV.
- ✓ Ask the prospective locum tenens doctor to visit or call your practice and meet nurses and other staff. This advance meeting also gives staff a chance to interact with the physician before the hiring decision is made.
- ✓ Encourage the physician to talk with any current locum tenens in your office to learn about the practice.
- ✓ Establish open communication with your patients. Ask them to evaluate your locum tenens. Give patients an easy, direct way to contact you with compliments or concerns, such as your cell phone or e-mail.

my practice schedule, it has made good financial sense for my business. Employing a locum tenens eliminates pension and profit sharing costs. I also do not have to deal with the trauma of losing and gaining partners. On the other hand, I have made the financial investment of buying a condo for my locum tenens to live in and also cars for the locum tenens' use. Both “perks” are well worth the benefits of the staff position. In fact, adding a locum tenens to my practice has been such a positive experience that I will be adding a second full-time “temp MD” in the coming months. ☺

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