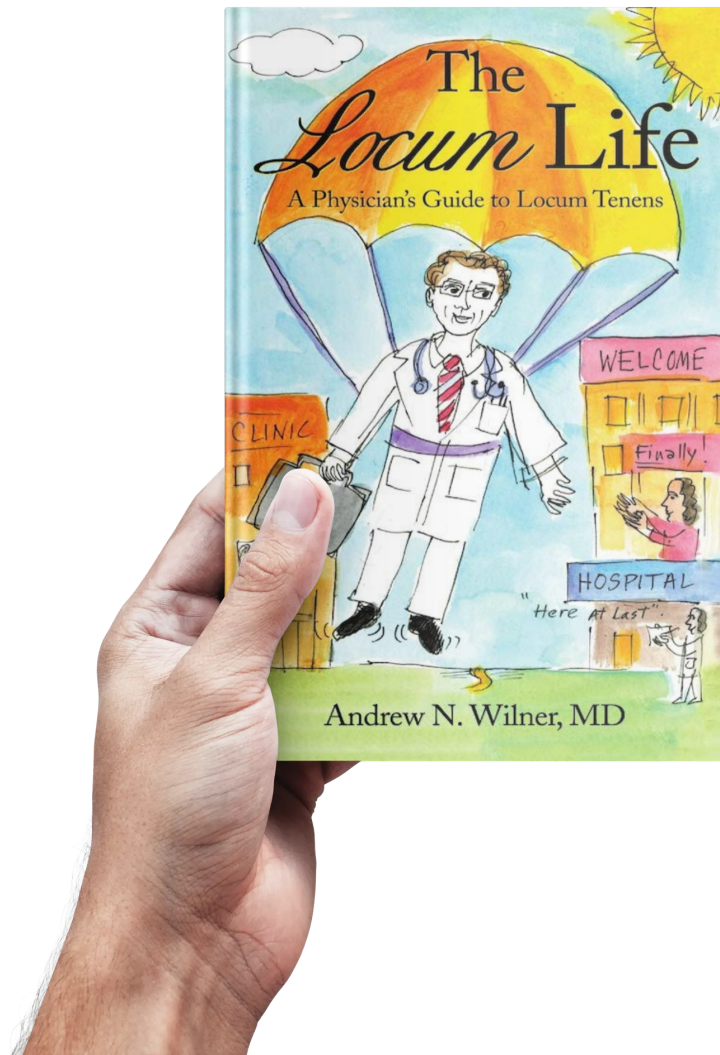


Ten Tips for Locum Tenens Docs

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A Resource in Conjunction With
[The Doctors Crossing Carpe Diem Podcast](#)
[Episode 24](#)

1. Be flexible! Flexibility goes against the grain for many docs, but it helps in a lot of ways. For example:

a. Assignment opportunities come and go very quickly. You need to drop what you are doing and return a staffing agent's call if you want to get the plum assignments.

b. Employers may cancel assignments within thirty days of the start date. It's happened to me twice. You need to have a backup plan and backup cash (see #7).

c. Available assignments may not always meet your expectations. However, if you are too demanding, you won't get any.

d. Medical culture varies from place to place. When you start a new assignment, you need to "go with the flow."

e. Personalities—there is no shortage of strong personalities in medicine, and the possibility of a "clash" is always there. As a temporary physician, your job is to get along. Remember, you are a "guest in someone else's house." The easier you are to get along with, the more likely the facility will be satisfied and even ask you back. I have also seen a pleasant, warm personality help deflect criticism when medical management goes amiss.

2. Clarify your motivation (Adventure, Extra Cash? Pre-retirement?) To get the "best" assignment, you need to define what "best" really means.

a. What is your prime motivation for doing locums? Are you fresh out of residency or fellowship and ready to see the world?

b. Are you mid-career and need extra cash for your mortgage, kids' braces, a vacation home, or to cover expenses of a family member's illness?

c. Are you pre-retirement, looking to continue to practice medicine but eager to get out of the rat race and slow down without actually retiring?

Locum tenens can help achieve all of these goals.

3. Consider a staffing agency that is a member of the National Association of Locum Tenens Organizations (NALTO.org).

a. About 80% of locum tenens physicians use a staffing agency to help them find assignments, plan travel, and provide housing and a rental car. NALTO is a voluntary organization that sets standards for locum tenens agencies. Member agencies are listed on their website and are an excellent place to start. However, many capable agencies are not NALTO members.

b. Even more important than the agency you choose is the agent. How experienced are they? How well do they know the market? How invested are they in your success? How well do you get along? Do they understand your short and long-term goals? These are questions you should have in the back of your mind when you select an agent.

c. You don't need an agency. I have had two excellent assignments that I arranged myself through personal contacts. The upside is no middle-man (agent) to complicate the process. The downside is no middle-man (agent) if things go awry.

4. Plan assignments at least 3-6 months ahead

a. Planning your assignments will reduce stress as well as help you get the best jobs. Advance planning will position your agent to present attractive assignments as soon as they become available. Of course, planning is problematic when you may face last-minute cancellations, which are not unusual.

5. Be nice to everyone

a. This advice should probably be included in the “Ten Commandments of Locum Tenens!” You will be the “new doc” at each assignment. How you get along with patients and staff is critical to your acceptance. Assessing your medical competence is much more challenging than noticing whether you are friendly and polite. If your personality doesn’t mesh with everyone you meet, just do your best to get along (i.e., fake it).

6. Apply early for state medical Licenses-Consider the IMLC (Interstate Medical Licensure Compact)

a. It can take a couple of weeks to get a temporary locum tenens license to more than six months to get a state medical license. You might think that hospitals in desperate need of physicians would expedite the process - they don’t. The state license boards have minimal motivation for speeding up the process, and you have no leverage. Even if you possess 49 state medical licenses in good standing, the 50th state medical board will take its own sweet time to grant you the “privilege” of its unique license.

b. Consequently, if you know where you want to work, apply right away for a state license. If you wait for an assignment to pop up in Florida, for example, and then apply for a license, the job will be long gone by the time you get the license approved.

c. Many locum docs keep several licenses, so they are ready to go when an assignment appears. At one point, I had ten! The number you need depends upon where you want to work and how much you want to travel. It also depends on job availability.

d. The IMLC can expedite licensing. Once you decide which states you want to work in, check to see whether the state belongs to the IMLC. If so, go that route (IMLCC.org).

7. Save 6-month emergency cash fund

a. A desirable assignment may not be available when you are. If you are picky, you may experience weeks or months without work. You don't want to be strapped for cash and have to take an assignment you don't want.

8. Don't let more than one year lapse out of practice

a. As part of the hospital privileging process, many hospitals require peer recommendations within the last one or two years. If you have not worked in the previous one or two years, it is impossible to fulfill this requirement. Medical volunteer work doesn't count. No matter how qualified you are (i.e., Board Certified in Everything) or the reason you were out (Had to care for my spouse dying of cancer), it won't matter. Insurance companies may also balk at insuring you if there is a "gap" in your practice record.

b. I worked as a medical journalist for ten years. I also did medical mission work, kept up my CME, paid my license fees, attend several neurology conferences a year, and wrote hundreds of articles about neurology. I was up to speed in my field, but I did not have an active patient practice. Potential employers repeatedly rejected me when I applied because of this "gap." I finally returned to practice after completing a couple of weeks of "supervised" clinical work, but I came a hair's breadth away from involuntary retirement. Don't let this happen to you. Had I known of this hidden requirement, I would have worked locum tenens a few weeks a year!

9. Don't be afraid to negotiate compensation

a. It never dawned on me when I took my first locum tenens job that compensation was negotiable. One of the advantages of working with staffing agents is their familiarity with the going pay rate. You can also compare compensation rates to other similar positions. In many cases, it doesn't hurt to ask, "Is this the highest compensation the client will pay?" As a locum tenens physician, it's always up to you whether to accept or reject an offer.

10. Dress for success!

a. Even though you have invested years of your life in medical training, the first thing patients and staff notice is how you look. If you present yourself as a professional in business attire and neatly groomed, it will go a long way to making a good impression. If you hang around long enough, people will eventually appreciate your abilities. However, for many people you work with, your appearance and attitude are all they will ever know. You can get a lot of mileage out of a neatly pressed white coat and a smile.

N.B. Detailed recommendations for a successful locum tenens career are discussed in my book, "[The Locum Life: A Physician's Guide to Locum Tenens](#)," available in print and audiobook at Amazon and Audible.com. If you need a free referral to a great locum tenens staffing agent or have additional questions, contact me through my website: www.andrewwilner.com