



# 2021 SURVEY OF LOCUM TENENS PHYSICIANS AND ADVANCED PRACTITIONERS



# Introduction

Staff Care is a leading healthcare staffing firm specializing in matching temporary (i.e., *locum tenens*) physicians, physician assistants (PAs), nurse practitioners (NPs), certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs), dentists and other healthcare professionals with hospitals, medical groups, government facilities, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and other healthcare facilities nationwide.

Established in 1992, Staff Care is a company of AMN Healthcare (NYSE: AHS), the leader in innovative healthcare workforce solutions and the largest healthcare staffing organization in the United States as ranked by *Staffing Industry Analysts*. Staff Care is proud to be certified by the Joint Commission and by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).

As a thought leader in its industry, Staff Care produces a continuous series of surveys, white papers and other information pertaining to temporary health care staffing trends. The *2021 Survey of Locum Tenens Physicians and Advanced Practitioners* marks the 15th survey Staff Care has completed examining locum tenens staffing trends. In the past, Staff Care's surveys were divided into two parts, Part I being a survey of hospital, medical group and other healthcare facility administrators regarding their use of locum tenens physicians and other healthcare professionals. Part II of the survey included responses from physicians and advanced practice professionals who work as locum tenens providers regarding their experiences and perspectives.

The two parts of the survey now are conducted and released separately. Staff Care's *Survey of Temporary Physician Staffing Trends*, which looks at how and why healthcare facilities use locum tenens physicians (formerly Part I of the survey), was released in January, 2020. Staff Care's *2021 Survey of Locum Tenens Physicians and Advanced Practitioners* (formerly Part II of the survey) focuses on how healthcare providers view locum tenens work and was released in June, 2021.

## Locum Tenens: A Longstanding Tradition

The practice of one physician filling in for another who is temporarily absent from his or her practice is time-honored in the medical profession. Known as *locum tenens* (Latin for "to take the place of") physicians have filled in for colleagues who are ill, travelling or otherwise away from their practices as a professional courtesy for over 200 years.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that the use of locum tenens physicians expanded from limited, ad hoc assignments arranged by physicians themselves to a more broad-based and systematic component of medical

staffing. Government grants allotted to make physicians available in medically underserved areas ushered in the modern era of locum tenens staffing. Locum tenens staffing agencies such as Staff Care were developed to meet the needs of healthcare facilities seeking to supplement their medical staffs with temporary healthcare professionals. These now include physicians, NPs, PAs, CRNAs, dentists and others.

Today, hospitals, medical groups, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and many other facilities use locum tenens providers for a variety of reasons, while at the same time a growing number of providers are choosing to work on a locum tenens basis. In Staff Care's *2020 Survey of Temporary Physician Staffing Trends*, 85% of healthcare facility managers reported using locum tenens physicians sometime in the previous 12 months. The 2020 survey also estimated that 52,000 physicians worked as locum tenens in 2019, up from 26,000 in 2002.

## Why Work as a Locum?

Why do physician, PAs, NPs and other healthcare professionals choose to work locum tenens assignments? How many such assignments do they typically accept, how far are they willing to travel, to what extent are they accepted and how has Covid-19 affected their willingness to work locums?

The *2021 Survey of Locum Tenens Physicians and Advanced Practice Professionals* addresses these and related questions while providing a profile of healthcare providers who work on a locum tenens basis. Survey results may prove useful to healthcare professionals, healthcare administrators, policy makers, and members of the media who follow healthcare professional supply and demand, practice patterns, and staffing trends.

## Methodology

Staff Care's *2021 Survey of Locum Tenens Physicians and Advanced Practice Professionals* was emailed throughout March, 2021 to a proprietary list of physicians and advanced practice professionals known to have worked on locum tenens basis sometime in the previous 12 months. Healthcare professionals included physicians, PAs, NPs, CRNAs and dentists who have worked as locum tenens through Staff Care, through other staffing agencies, or on their own.

Responses were received from 672 healthcare professionals. Responses from several previous years the survey was conducted are included where relevant.



# Key Findings

(based on 672 responses)

Staff Care's 2021 Survey of Locum Tenens Physicians and Advanced Practitioners provides insights into the experiences and perspectives of physicians and other healthcare professionals working as locum tenens. Key findings include:

- **The majority of locum tenens providers (71%) have treated Covid-19 patients, suggesting locum tenens providers have played a significant role as caregivers during the pandemic.**
- **Only 27% of locum tenens providers stopped working locum tenens assignments or reduced the number they work as a result of Covid-19. The majority (73%) either did not change the number of locum assignments they worked or increased the number of assignments.**
- **Only 13% of providers working locum tenens are primary care physicians (family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics), down from 21% in 2016. Demand for primary care locum tenens physicians, while still robust, has decreased in recent years while demand for specialist physicians has increased.**
- **More NPs and PAs are working as locum tenens. 16% of providers working locum tenens are NPs or PAs, up from 8% in 2016.**
- **45% of locum tenens providers are female. Female providers may choose to work locum tenens because of the schedule flexibility it offers.**
- **The majority of locum tenens providers (71%) are 51 or older, while 44% are 61 or older, suggesting that locum tenens is a practice style adopted by mostly older providers. However, 13% are 40 or younger, indicating some younger providers choose to work as locum tenens.**
- **The majority of locum tenens providers (62%) have been in practice 21 years or more, while 8% have been in practice 5 years or less.**
- **Only 24% of locum tenens providers indicated they began locum tenens work after they retired from permanent practice. The majority (76%) began working locums prior to retirement, 58% began working locums in mid-career, while 16% started right after training.**
- **The majority of locum tenens providers (61%) work 1-3 locum tenens assignments a year, while 18% work 7 or more.**
- **90% of locum tenens providers indicated that working locum assignments is as satisfying or more satisfying than permanent practice. Only 10% say it is less satisfying.**

- Freedom/flexibility is the primary benefit of working locum tenens, cited by 82% of providers, followed by pay rate, cited by 55%. The opportunity to travel ranks third, cited by 50% of providers.
- Locum tenens providers typically work with more than one staffing agency to find temporary assignments. 51% work with 2-3 staffing agencies, while 13% work with four or more. One-third (33%) work with only one agency.
- Pay rate is the most important factor in selecting a locum tenens assignment, cited by 79% of providers, followed by location of the assignment, cited by 70%, and available shifts, cited by 60%.
- **Locum tenens providers choose a staffing agency based on their relationship with a particular recruiter at the agency, cited by 76% of providers as most important in selecting an agency.**
- Only 35% of locum tenens providers are willing to travel nationwide to an assignment. 32% will travel to a region, while 33% will travel only to their home region or home state.
- Locum tenens providers are widely accepted at their assignments. 90% said they are accepted by colleagues, 96% said they are accepted by patients, and 82% are accepted by administration/department heads.
- 66% of locum tenens providers indicated that working as a locum has expanded their understanding of different healthcare delivery systems, 56% say it has expanded their professional networks, and 49% say it has provided them with positive travel experiences.

# Questions Asked and Responses Received

(All responses rounded to the nearest digit)

## 1.

What is your specialty?

	2021	2019*	2016	2014
Primary Care (FP, IM, Pediatrics)	13%	11%	21%	16%
Psychiatry/Behavioral Health	6%	6%	16%	6%
Other	16%	21%	11%	25%
Emergency Medicine	9%	10%	9%	8%
Anesthesiology	8%	6%	8%	10.5%
IM sub-specialties	5%	4%	6%	5%
Hospitalist	8%	4%	5%	4%
Nurse Practitioner/Physician Assistant	16%	15%	5%	8%
Oncology	N/A	1%	4%	2%
Surgery	4%	6%	4%	4%
Radiology	N/A	4%	4%	5%
Physician Assistant	N/A	N/A	3%	5%
Urgent Care	N/A	3%	2%	1%
Neurology	N/A	1%	1%	2%
Dentistry	7%	N/A	N/A	N/A
CRNA	8%	8%	N/A	N/A

\*Survey conducted in 2019, but no report completed

## 2.

What is your age?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
<b>30 or younger</b>	1%	1%	1%	2%
<b>31 to 40</b>	12%	10%	9%	12%
<b>41 to 50</b>	16%	14%	14%	20%
<b>51 to 60</b>	27%	27%	28%	31%
<b>61 to 70</b>	31%	30%	33%	25%
<b>71 plus</b>	13%	18%	15%	10.5%

## 3.

What is your gender?\*

\*Question asked for the first time in 2021

	2021
<b>Male</b>	54%
<b>Female</b>	45%
<b>Non-binary/other</b>	1%

## 4.

How many years have you been in practice?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
<b>Less than one year</b>	1%	1%	1%	2%
<b>1 to 5 years</b>	7%	10%	5%	9%
<b>6 to 10 years</b>	11%	7%	8%	10%
<b>11 to 20 years</b>	19%	21%	21%	24%
<b>21 or more years</b>	62%	61%	65%	55%

## 5.

How long have you worked locum tenens?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
Less than one year	18%	23%	30%	31%
1 to 5 years	42%	45%	40%	42%
6 to 10 years	21%	17%	16%	16%
11 or more years	19%	15%	14%	11%

## 6.

At what stage of your career did you first work as a locum tenens?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
Right after training	16%	14%	15%	21%
Mid-career	58%	54%	49%	55%
After retiring from permanent practice	26%	32%	36%	24%

## 7.

About how many locum tenens assignments do you work during a year?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
1-3	61%	71%	71%	70%
4-6	21%	20%	18%	18%
7 or more	18%	19%	11%	12%

## 8.

How would you rate working as a locum tenens versus working in a permanent position?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
Locum tenens is <b>MORE</b> satisfying	38%	26%	16%	17%
Locum tenens is <b>LESS</b> satisfying	10%	17%	21%	19%
Both types are <b>EQUALLY</b> satisfying	42%	57%	63%	64%
Unsure/don't know	10%	N/A	N/A	N/A

## 9.

What are the benefits of working as a locum tenens? (Check all that apply)

	2021	2019	2016	2014
Freedom/ flexibility	82%	87%	89%	85%
Pay rate	55%	57%	50%	53%
No politics	NA%	57%	48%	51%
Travel	50%	49%	46%	48%
Professional development	17%	38%	24%	24%
A way to find perm	NA%	15%	16%	23%
Reduced paperwork/Bureaucracy	42%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Reduced feelings of burnout	43%	N/A	N/A	N/A

## 10.

With how many locum tenens agencies do you work?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
None	3%	7%	13%	13%
1	33%	29%	31%	29%
2-3	51%	52%	45%	46%
4 or more	13%	12%	11%	12%

## 11.

What is important to you in selecting a locum tenens agency?\*

\*Question asked for the first time in this format in 2021

	VERY IMPORTANT	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	LEAST IMPORTANT
Relation with recruiter	76%	20%	4%
Benefits and travel discounts	53%	30%	17%
Understanding the process and timeline	68%	27%	5%
Focused on my needs	73%	22%	5%
Reputation and values of agency	62%	31%	7%
Number of opportunities offered	67%	29%	4%

## 12.

What is important to you in selecting a locum tenens assignment?\*

\*Question asked for the first time in this format in 2021

	VERY IMPORTANT	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	LEAST IMPORTANT
Location	70%	24%	6%
Pay rate	79%	19%	2%
Length of assignment	59%	35%	6%
Healthcare facility of assignment	46%	44%	10%
Staffing agency	34%	50%	16%
Patient load	53%	40%	8%
Available shifts	60%	33%	8%
Job title	19%	32%	49%
Benefits (housing, meals, incidentals)	54%	36%	11%

## 13.

How far are you willing to travel?

	2021	2019	2016	2014
Nationwide	35%	46%	39%	41%
Specific region only	32%	26%	26%	28%
Home region only	18%	15%	20%	18%
Home state only	15%	13%	15%	13%

## 14.

As a Locum Tenens Provider, how well are you accepted by each of these groups:

	ACCEPTED	TOLERATED	NOT ACCEPTED
Colleagues	90%	8%	1%
Administration/Department heads	82%	15%	2%
Patients	96%	3%	<1%

## 15.

Has working locum tenens affected you in any of the following ways?  
(Check all that apply)

	2021	2016	2014
Enhanced my understanding of different delivery systems	66%	65%	66%
Expanded my professional networking opportunities	56%	53%	55%
Created valuable new personal relationships	53%	51%	52%
Afforded positive travel experiences	49%	49%	51%
Enhanced my clinical skills	42%	37%	41%

## 16.

Have you provided care to Covid-19 patients in the last year?

Yes	71%
No	29%

## 17.

How has Covid-19 affected your willingness to work as a locum?

I have stopped working locums until the pandemic is resolved	5%
I have reduced the number of locums assignments I take because of the pandemic	22%
I have made no change in the number of assignments I take	55%
I have worked more locums assignments due to the pandemic	18%



## Trends And Observations

Like the health system in general, the way physicians and other healthcare professionals practice is changing.

The traditional physician practice model, in which doctors own their own solo practice or are partners in an independent group, is evolving as physicians embrace a variety of practice styles. These can include the traditional, private practice model, but may extend to employment by a hospital, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), an urgent care center, a retail clinic, an insurance company, a corporation or a number of other employer types. NPs, PAs and other healthcare professionals also have more sites of service to choose from, and, like physicians, are increasingly likely to work for large, integrated healthcare organizations.

In addition, a growing number of physicians today are electing to work part-time, are transitioning out of clinical roles and into management positions or are taking other steps to modify their practice styles.

The chart below shows results to a question posed by a national survey conducted by Merritt Hawkins in 2018 for The Physicians Foundation ([www.physiciansfoundation.org](http://www.physiciansfoundation.org)).

### In the next one to three years, do you plan to (check all that apply):

Continue as I am	54%
Cut back on hours	22%
Retire	17%
Switch to a cash/concierge practice	5%
<b>Work locum tenens</b>	<b>8%</b>
Seek a non-clinical job	12%
Become employed by a hospital	4%
Work part-time	9%
Merge with another physician or group	3%
Sell my practice to a hospital/corporate entity	2%

Source: A Survey of America's Physicians: Practice Plans and Perspectives. The Physicians Foundation/Merritt Hawkins. September, 2018.

As these numbers indicate, the majority of physicians (54%) surveyed in 2018 planned to continue practicing as they are. However, close to one-half (46%) planned to make one or more changes to their practices, including retiring, cutting back on hours, working part-time or working locum tenens.

## Covid-19 Adds to Healthcare Workforce Volatility

The coronavirus pandemic is likely to add to the volatility of the healthcare workforce. In the 2020 edition of the *Survey of America's Physicians*, which focused on physicians and their response to Covid-19, 12% of physicians indicated they had switched to a primarily telemedicine practice as a result of the virus, 8% said they had closed their practices, 6% said they had moved to a new employment situation or practice and 2% said they had switched from permanent practice to locum tenens.

Covid-19 has caused physicians and other healthcare professionals a great deal of stress. In the 2020 *Survey of America's Physicians*, 58% of physicians indicated they often experience feelings of professional burnout, up from 40% in 2018. Twenty-four percent of physicians said they sought medical attention for a physical problem as a result of Covid-19 and 13% sought medical attention for a mental health problem.

Many other types of healthcare professionals also have been physically and mentally taxed by the pandemic.

## Locum Tenens: A Timely Alternative

Locum tenens is one of the various practice alternatives physicians plan to pursue. Eight percent of physicians responding to the 2018 *Survey of America's Physicians* indicated they planned to work locum tenens in the next one to three years.

Locum tenens offers physicians and other healthcare professionals relief from some of the factors that typically lead to burnout, including excessive paperwork duties associated with practice management and reimbursement, political infighting, and burdensome work schedules. It allows them to put more focus on what they were trained to do – treat patients – and less focus on duties that distract them from patient care.

Given the impact of Covid-19, physicians and other healthcare professionals are likely to reassess their practice options – and working locum tenens will be one of the alternatives they may consider.

Staff Care's 2021 *Survey of Locum Tenens Physicians and Advanced Practice Professionals* offers insights into who locum tenens providers are, why they choose to work on a temporary basis, how they have been affected by Covid-19 and related matters.

## Most Locum Tenens Providers Are Physician Specialists, NPs, PAs, or CRNAs

Only 13% of survey respondents indicated they are primary care physicians, defined as those who practice family medicine, internal medicine or pediatrics. This is down from 21% in 2016 and is the lowest percent of survey respondents identifying as primary care practitioners since Staff Care first conducted the survey in 2001. By contrast, in 2006, 40% of respondents to the survey indicated they were primary care physicians, as did 28% of respondents in 2010.

This decline is due in part to the fact that a growing number of survey respondents are advanced practice professionals such as NPs, PAs and CRNAs. However, it also signals a change in physician supply and demand dynamics.

In its June 2021 report, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) projected a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034, including a shortage of over 47,000 primary care physicians but an even greater shortage of over 77,000 specialist physicians (*The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2019 to 2034. Association of American Medical Colleges*).

When hospitals, medical groups and other healthcare facilities cannot find the permanent staff they need, they often turn to locum tenens providers to fill gaps. The use of locum tenens providers therefore can act as a "canary in the coal mine" signaling the types of physicians and other providers that are in short supply.

The shortage of specialists is directly tied to the aging of the patient population and to the aging of the physician workforce. An elderly population requires more specialists such as cardiologists, orthopedic surgeons, urologists, gastroenterologists, neurologists, psychiatrists and others to care for ailing organs, bones, and declining mental health. Many physicians in these specialties are aging and nearing retirement, whereas primary care physicians are among the youngest types of doctors.

A second reason why demand for primary care services has abated is that some patients are turning away from the primary care delivery model. According to a November 2018 report from the Health Care Cost Institute, office visits to primary care physicians dropped by 18% between 2012 and 2016. In 2012, 51% of office visits for patients under 65 were to primary care physicians. That number dropped to 43% in 2016, according to the report. Young people, in particular, seem less inclined to see a primary care physician, as the chart below indicates:

Adults Who Have No Primary Care Physician		
18-29	30-49	50-64
45%	25%	18%

Source: Health Care Cost Institute/Kaiser Health News. November 18, 2018.

## More NPs and PAs Working as Locum Tenens

While visits to primary care physicians declined nationally from 2012 to 2016, visits to advanced practice professionals such as NPs and PAs increased by 129%, underlining that the manner in which patients access the healthcare system is evolving. Venues that provide convenient care, such as urgent care centers and retail clinics, have become more popular, and these sites of service typically are staffed by NPs and PAs. A growing number of younger people are using these sites, as well as telemedicine, as their main source of primary care.

Demand for locum tenens NPs and PAs has grown accordingly. Sixteen percent of survey respondents identified as NPs or PAs, the highest number since Staff Care began conducting the survey, while 7% of respondents identified as CRNAs.

Healthcare staffing trends are cyclical and demand for locum tenens primary care physicians will likely increase as more primary care doctors will be required to manage the complex care of older patients and to address the fallout of Covid-19 or other healthcare challenges. For now, however, the survey indicates that the great majority of healthcare professionals working as locum tenens are medical specialists, NPs, PAs and CRNAs.

## Many Locum Tenens Providers Are Female

Close to half of survey respondents (45%) are female. Just over one third of all physicians (34%) are female, as are 63% of PAs, 90% of NPs and 60% of CRNAs. Physicians represent approximately 70% of survey respondents and are less likely to be female than are advanced practitioners. Nevertheless, the survey indicates that female professionals are well represented among the ranks of locum tenens providers.

## A Relatively Older Demographic

Seventy-one percent of physicians responding to the survey are 51 years old or older, while 44% are 61 or older, indicating that locum tenens providers are relatively older than providers in permanent practice. However, 13% of survey respondents are 40 or younger, suggesting that some younger providers also work locum tenens.

## A Choice for All Career Stages

Traditionally, locum tenens has been the practice choice of mostly older providers, some of whom work temporary assignments as a way to “semi-retire” after they have left permanent practice. About one-quarter of survey respondents (26%) indicated they began working locum tenens after retiring from a permanent practice.

However, the majority of locum tenens providers are not post-retirees. Sixteen percent of survey respondents said they began working locum tenens right after completing their training, suggesting that some providers are choosing to work locums as their first job option. For some newly trained providers, locum tenens presents a way to “test drive” different practice settings such as hospitals, medical groups (large or small), urgent care centers and others, or as a way to scope out various geographic locations before settling on a permanent practice.

Locum tenens also offers newly trained providers a flexible schedule, which can be particularly attractive to female professionals entering their child rearing years.

More than half of survey respondents (58%) indicated they first worked locum tenens at mid-career. Some of these mid-career providers (physicians, in particular) have decided to opt out of permanent practice due to various “hassle factors,” including rising levels of bureaucracy in medicine, declining reimbursement, loss of clinical autonomy, malpractice costs, Covid-19 and related issues. By working locum tenens, they are able to preserve what most providers enjoy about medicine (e.g., patient care) while avoiding many of the problematic aspects of today’s medical practice environment. Other mid-career providers maintain their permanent positions by moonlighting as locum tenens to supplement their incomes or to enjoy the benefits of travel and diverse practice settings.

## Selecting a Locum Tenens Assignment

The majority of survey respondents (61%) indicated they work 1-3 locum tenens assignments per year. The length of these assignments can vary from just a few days to 12 months or more. Some providers are semi-retired and work locum tenens on a part-time basis, while some are in permanent practice but moonlight as locum tenens at their discretion. Others choose to make locum tenens their full-time practice style, working temporary assignments year-round.

The majority of survey respondents (79%) rated pay as very important when selecting a locum tenens assignment. Locum tenens providers are typically paid at an hourly rate and also are reimbursed for travel and accommodation. Hourly rates vary by profession or medical specialty. NPs and PAs generally are paid in the \$650 range per diem, while hourly pay for physicians may range widely, from \$700 to over \$4,000 per diem depending on specialty. Additional pay can be earned through working overtime. By working locum tenens throughout the year, and by working some overtime, providers can earn income comparable to levels common in permanent practice.

Seventy percent of respondents rated location as very important when selecting a locum tenens assignment. Locum tenens providers choose which assignments they wish to accept and are not obligated by staffing agencies to work any specific number of assignments or in any particular locations. They may choose specific assignment locations in order to be close to family, to experience various practice settings or to enjoy local amenities.

Other factors rated as very important when selecting a locum tenens opportunity by 50% or more of survey respondents include length of assignment, available shifts, and benefits such as paid travel.

The majority of those surveyed indicated they confine their choice of locum tenens assignments to regional, state or local areas. Only 35% said they are willing to travel nationally.

## Selecting a Staffing Agency

The great majority of locum tenens providers work through a staffing agency to find assignments, coordinate travel, schedule shifts, outline job parameters and handle other logistics. Only 3% indicated they do not work with an agency and presumably make arrangements on their own.

One-third of providers said they work with one agency, while 64% work with two or more. Typically, locum tenens providers are independent contractors and are free to work through as many staffing agencies as they like. Sometimes working with more than one agency helps ensure that providers have multiple assignments to choose from and can work year-round if that is their preference.

The majority (76%) indicated that their relationship with a recruiter is very important when selecting a staffing agency. A staffing agency recruiter will work on the provider's behalf to ensure they have the type and number of assignments they prefer and that the process is as seamless as possible. The recruiter also acts as a liaison with the facility where the assignment takes place, ensuring necessary communication and resolving any problems that may arise.

Among other factors rated as very important by providers when selecting a staffing agency are a focus on the provider's needs, understanding the process and number of assignments offered.

## The Benefits of Locum Tenens

When asked to identify the primary benefits of working locum tenens, providers cited freedom/flexibility as the number one benefit. Eighty-two percent of survey respondents selected freedom/flexibility as a benefit of working locum tenens, followed by pay (55%), travel (50%), reduced burnout (43%) and reduced bureaucracy (42%).

Though travel is cited as a benefit of locum tenens, most providers are not choosing locum tenens as a form of tourism – they are embracing it as a respite from the obligations, stresses and burdensome schedules of permanent practice.

The majority of providers (80%) said they find locum tenens to be as satisfying or more satisfying than permanent practice, while only 10% said they find it less satisfying than permanent practice. This may be due in part to the fact that locum tenens providers now are a common component of many hospital and medical groups staffs and are widely accepted. The great majority of those surveyed (96%) said they are accepted by patients when on assignment, 90% said they are accepted by colleagues, and 82% said they are accepted by administrators and department heads.

## Career Enrichment

Locum tenens work allows physicians to experience a wide range of practice environments with varying standards of care. It offers a positive forum for acquiring professional skills and is something of a medical education for many providers, a fact reflected in the survey.

When asked how working locum tenens has affected them, 66% of providers said it enhanced their understanding of different delivery systems. Healthcare delivery in the United States has often been described as a patchwork quilt, as equipment, organizational structures, policies, procedures, and treatments vary from one region or even one hospital to another. Working locum tenens allows providers to obtain a better understanding of how standards of care and organizational structures differ locally, regionally, and nationally.

Fifty-three percent of respondents said that working locum tenens has allowed them to create valuable new personal relationships. Though locum tenens assignments may be brief, they can offer the sort of intense, learn-on-the-fly environments that often lead to bonding with co-workers. Working together to solve problems or share insights and experiences, many locum tenens providers create lasting friendships with their colleagues. In addition, 49% of providers said working locum tenens afforded them positive travel experiences, 56% said it expanded their professional networking opportunities, 42% said it enhanced their clinical skills, 43% said it reduced burnout and 42% said it reduced bureaucracy requirements.

## Responding to Covid-19

Locum tenens providers were asked if they provided care to Covid-19 patients in the previous year. The majority (71%) indicated that they had. As the pandemic swept over different geographic regions of the country, hospitals and other facilities found it necessary to supplement their staffs with temporary healthcare professionals. Thousands of temporary nurses answered this call and continue to do so nationwide. The survey indicates that temporary physicians, NPs, PAs and CRNAs also have been used to supplement the staffs of healthcare facilities treating Covid-19 patients.

The survey also indicates that the majority of providers were not deterred by the pandemic from working locum tenens assignments. Only 5% said they stopped working locum tenens as a result of the coronavirus, while 22% said they decreased the number of locum assignments they accepted. However, the majority (63%) either did not alter the number of locum assignments they accepted or increased the number of assignments.



## Conclusion

As the healthcare system changes, so does the manner in which physicians, advanced practice professionals and other healthcare providers choose to practice. Many providers today elect to work on a locums basis, supplementing the staffs of hospitals, medical groups and other healthcare facilities nationwide. Staff Care's *2021 Survey of Locum Tenens Physicians and Advanced Practice Professionals* indicates that a growing percent of locum tenens providers are physician specialists, NPs, and PAs, while a relatively smaller number are primary care physicians. Though locum tenens providers tend to be older on average than those in permanent practice, they choose to work locums at all stages of their careers, not just after they retire. Providers rate freedom/flexibility as the primary benefit of working locum tenens and indicate they are widely accepted on temporary assignments by colleagues, administrators and patients. The majority of locum tenens physicians and advanced practitioners (71%) treated Covid-19 patients in the previous year, suggesting locum tenens providers are playing an important role in providing care during the pandemic.



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