

Emerging Trend

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Growing Demand for Locum Tenens Dentists

Introduction

There is a growing need for healthcare professions across the board. The dental fraternity is no exception. This is why temporary providers are increasingly being used to fill the gap between the demand and supply of healthcare professionals in private practices, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities and groups.

Historically, locum tenens dentists and doctors were used to fill in for residents who were either ill, or on vacation, or otherwise absent due to any other reason. However, today temporary providers are not only common, but their use is prompted mainly due to a national shortage of healthcare providers among various verticals.

Demand for Locum Tenens Dentists

Dentists are in big demand in rural as well as in metropolitan city communities. Dentists most in demand are – General practice, Pediatric, Endodontic, and Oral and Maxillofacial. Locum tenens dentists can effectively meet the growing demand, help maintain continuity of services and revenue, and step into temporary positions until permanent candidates can be hired.

Private dental practices both in rural and metropolitan areas are also actively using temporary providers in large numbers. The need for locum tenens dentists in private practice is mainly felt when the resident dentists need to take vacations, or due to illness or military deployment. Temporary dentists are also used to fill in when the practice hires a new graduate. The locum tenens dentist serves from the time the graduate is licensed till the time they are ready to be absorbed into the practice.

Another way in which locum tenens dentists can be used is when the practice wants to secure a new associate via the “temp-to-perm” process. The practice dentist can evaluate the work of the temporary dentist prior to offering them a permanent position at the practice. At some point, when the locum tenens dentist is permanently employed and comfortable with the practice, they may eventually purchase the practice. Additionally, locum tenens dentists can also serve in specialty areas on an “as and when needed” basis to provide services that the practice otherwise will be required to refer out.

Benefits Vs. Cost of Hiring Locum Tenens Dentists

An illness cannot be avoided. And dentists need vacation or other reasons for taking time off from work just as any other working professional. A practice cannot afford to take a hit in revenue and loss in its patient base in the absence of a dentist and or other supporting dental staff. In the absence of a dentist, patient wait times go up. This can impact not only high revenue generation procedures, but also patients who come in for routine appointments which can lead to patients seeking services elsewhere.

As mentioned earlier in the article, locum tenens dentists can help a practice maintain continuity of care and ensure revenue is not impacted. Anytime a dental practice decides to hire a temporary provider, patients should be informed that they will be seen by a dentist who is filling in the spot while their regular dentist is out for the day or week. It is always a good idea to have the temp dentist introduced by the regular dentist or if that is not possible, then the staff should inform patients that the temporary dentist was hand-picked by their regular dentist. In such instances, the practice benefits from better patient impressions; instead of referring patients to a dentist at a different practice or office, patients will be seen by a dentist selected by the practice in the same office.

Locum tenens dentists can be paid in one of two ways — a per diem option or a production option. If opting for a per diem option, the practice is required to pay a daily rate (which may vary) for the locum tenens dentist's services. If paying via the production formula, the practice is required to pay the staffing agency a specific percentage cut of the revenue that is generated by the locum tenens dentist when the figure reaches the agreed upon base line of revenue.

TOP BENEFITS OF HIRING LOCUM TENENS DENTISTS FOR YOUR PRACTICE



A growing number of dentists are successfully exploring opportunities to take on temporary assignments in a variety of settings.



Driven by a national shortage of dentists, the use of locum tenens is proving to be an effective way of maintaining services in the absence of practicing dentists.



In addition to private practices, locum tenens dentists are filling in temporary positions in hospitals and other oral healthcare centers across the country.



LOCUM TENENS DENTISTS IN DEMAND

- General practice.
- Pediatric.
- Endodontic.
- Oral and Maxillofacial.
- Dental Public Health.
- Oral Pathology.
- Oral Surgeon.
- Orthodontics.



According to estimates provided by the Association of American Medical colleges, there will be a projected deficit of 159,000 physicians by 2025.



Dental practices as well as other oral healthcare facilities that are unable to hire permanent dentists or if their resident dentist is absent due to sickness or on vacation can use locum tenens dentists to ensure continuity of services and revenue.



This trend is mirrored in nursing as well; temporary nurses or "travelers," as they are generally referred to, are a growing clinical workforce that is mobile and not tightly bound to a specific site of service.

TOP BENEFITS OF LOCUM TENENS DENTISTS

Private dental practices can use locum tenens dentists in the following capacity;



To fill in for a permanent dentist during maternity or sick leave, vacations, and or military deployment.



To maintain services if the practice has recruited a new graduate; the temporary dentist can work with the practice until the time the graduate is licensed and ready to practice.



To secure a new associate through the "temp-to-perm" process; the established dentist has a chance to evaluate the work of a temporary dentist prior to making him/her a permanent employee.



To serve in specialty areas on an "as and when needed" basis to provide services that the practice otherwise will be required to refer out.

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Why Dentists Are Opting to Work as Locum Tenens

Today dentists are actively opting to work as locum tenens for a number of reasons. Experience is one reason. Most locum tenens dentists have good experience years behind them and instead of retiring permanently, these dentists prefer to work locum tenens. It allows them an easier schedule and a steady source of income.

The other reason is flexibility. Locum tenens dentists have the option to choose when and where they want to practice. They are not bound by legal and or professional obligations to work at a practice. If they need to travel during an assignment, their travel, accommodations, and malpractice insurance are covered.

Locum tenens is a viable option among the new generation of dentists as well. These dentists can use locum tenens assignments to gauge the working environment at different practice settings before deciding to take on a permanent role. A locum tenens assignment is also an ideal option if they are waiting till a permanent job begins.

Conclusion

Clearly, the benefits of hiring locum tenens dentists are impactful to continuity of patient care and practice revenue. However, locum tenens dentists are still an emerging trend among the dental workforce. How quickly the trend pick-ups will depend largely on how the on-going demand and supply inconsistencies for dentists are addressed. If the inconsistencies continue, then the role of locum tenens dentists will only get bigger and more important.

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