



Family physicians and locum tenens

Locum tenens play a vital role in supporting physicians' practices during times of illness, vacation, continuing medical education, or parental leave. In some communities, locums provide all the care in place of permanent physicians. According to the 2007 National Physician Survey (NPS), 35% of FPs across Canada were not able to use locums in the previous year because none was available. Only 13% of FPs were satisfied with the availability of locum coverage.

Who provides locum services?

- Nineteen percent of all FPs (8% of whom describe themselves as semiretired).
- Compared with the total FP population, a greater percentage of locums are the following:
 - women (42% vs 38%) ($P < .001$);
 - aged 35 years or younger (18% vs 9%) or 65 years or older (10% vs 8%) ($P < .001$);
 - former residents trained at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver or the University of Calgary in Alberta ($P < 0.001$);
 - working in British Columbia, Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, or the Territories ($P < .05$);
 - serving remote patient populations ($P < .001$); and
 - receiving 90% or more of their professional income from blended payments ($P < .001$).
- Fifty-eight percent of second-year family medicine residents intend to work as locums within the 2 to 3 years after completing residency.

Why do a locum?

There are several reasons FPs choose to do locum tenens:

- to assess potential future practice locations (10%);
- the flexibility and ability to set one's own schedule (18%);
- financial reasons (18%);
- clinical variety (19%); and
- to fill a service need (33%).

How much coverage do locums provide?

- Twenty-one percent of locums provided up to 2 weeks of locum service in the previous year.
- Twelve percent provided 6 months or more of locum service in the previous year.

- **Table 1** compares FPs who locum for 6 months or more per year with FPs who locum for fewer than 6 months per year and all FPs.

Table 1. Characteristics of FPs who locum for ≥ 6 mo/y compared with those of FPs who locum < 6 mo/y and those of all FPs: There was no significant difference in satisfaction with current professional life between those who locum for ≥ 6 mo/y and those who locum for < 6 mo/y; all other comparisons were statistically significant at $P = .05$.

CHARACTERISTICS	FPS WHO LOCUM FOR ≥ 6 MO/Y (N = 645), %	FPS WHO LOCUM FOR < 6 MO/Y (N = 3206), %	ALL FPS (N = 30393), %
Female	66	42	38
Aged < 35 y	39	21	9
Self-described FPs	78	54	58
Self-described FPs with special focuses to their practices	20	39	30
Married or living with partners	74	80	85
Satisfied with their current professional lives	76	77	75
Satisfied with the balance between personal and professional commitments	66	60	56

The NPS is a collaborative project of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Additional results are available at www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca. If you would like the opportunity to develop and write a future Fast Fact using the NPS results, please contact Sarah Scott, National Physician Survey and Janus Project Coordinator, at 800 387-6197, extension 289, or sks@cfpc.ca.

