



Reflections

A full-time locum

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What is a locum?

Living and
Operating in a
Community where
Upractise
Medicine on a temporary basis.

How about that? Otherwise, *locum* is short for *locum tenens* (Latin) meaning “a place holder”—a person who temporarily fulfils the duties of another.¹ Working as a locum is increasingly common both nationally and internationally.² For the past 2 years, I have been working as a full-time locum, mainly in northern Ontario, and I have held hospital privileges in 8 different communities. My locum experiences have varied and involved replacing local family doctors in their offices, emergency departments, hospital wards, and long-term care facilities.

In 2 communities I looked after orphan patients in clinics designated as the *no-family-doctor clinic* and the *community-locum clinic*. I found the thought of working in these types of clinics more attractive than at walk-in clinics in large cities. Such clinics give people without their own family doctors a chance to see the same locum physician multiple times. I worked in one of these communities on a monthly basis, and I tried to see the same patients repeatedly in the hope of providing a sense of continuity of care. As I am finishing my full-time locum period now, it is not easy to end the relationships with these patients. It is comforting to know that in this particular community a new family doctor is starting a practice, and she will take over the care of a good number of

these patients. For most of them, getting a family doctor is like winning the lottery—maybe even better. The safety people feel and the continuity of care they receive when they have their own steady family doctors are invaluable.

I also had an opportunity to work in First Nations and Francophone communities, and after some time I felt as if I belonged to each one. During these past 2 years, I spent more time in these communities than I spent in Ottawa, Ont, my home-base. I went for periods of 1 to 4 weeks at a time, bringing my family along whenever it was convenient. We spent the past 2 March breaks in a community where we were able to enjoy different activities like skiing and ice fishing.

I came across some very friendly people and also some very friendly animals, including bears—who calmly posed for pictures, at times (cameraman safely in the car)—on the roadside, at the dump site, and once close to the locum house.

In addition to gaining experience in the clinical aspects of medicine, working as a locum provided me an opportunity to learn the administrative aspects as well. I had exposure to different ways of running a practice, and I took away what seemed to me to be the best aspects of each model. The other main advantage, of course, was the flexibility—choosing when and where to work. Working as a locum could also be considered paid tourism, as each of the communities I worked in had historical and natural attractions to offer. The most difficult part of doing locum work, naturally, was being on the road frequently, away from my family. I also had to adapt to different office policies and electronic medical record software—although it did not take long before this became second nature.

Locum physicians play a vital role in reducing staff shortages and enabling local physicians to get relief. Without these temporary substitutes, local physicians can be overworked, which negatively affects their ability to provide good health care. As I am preparing to start my own new practice, I will be crossing over to the other side—and looking for a locum physician’s coverage when I need relief.

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Competing interests

None declared

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Dr Seid with wife, Dina, daughter, Abigail, and son, Joseph.