

## TRY BEFORE YOU BUY: The Working Interview

A growing number of physicians “test drive” opportunities to find the best permanent fit.

ANNE BAYE ERICKSEN



Physicians agree to locum tenens opportunities for a variety of reasons, such as a means to supplement income, to keep clinical skills active while winding down professional commitments, or to escape administrative burdens inherent with running a private practice or being full-time hospital staff. In recent years, however, a greater percentage of individuals use locum tenens opportunities to experience different practice settings, geographic regions, and community personalities before signing on the dotted line for a permanent practice. Read on for insights from a company representative and three physicians who have an intimate understanding of this process.



### A MATTER OF TIME

Oftentimes, the traditional physician job interview entails a facility, private practice, or multi-specialty group bringing in a candidate for a day or so, during which both parties evaluate each other.



HAL BOWERS, MD

Questions are asked. Information is exchanged. Expectations are expressed. All in all, it is a lot to absorb in a short amount of time. Then again, because the process is fast-tracked, you could leave the interview with more questions than answers or feel like you still lack pertinent details.

“There are certain nuances to deciding whether to join a practice, and I think it’s invaluable

to spend time there as a locum tenens physician first,” offers Hal Bowers, MD. Although he currently accepts mobile contracts via Whitaker Medical, a staffing firm headquartered in Houston, Texas, the interventional radiologist is not opposed to signing on permanently somewhere if he thinks the fit is right. “I have always done the traditional interview-to-contract formula. But now that I have locum tenens experience, I feel strongly about the idea of using short-term contracts as a working interview. You get to slow down and look at what is going on around you.”

One of the advantages of entering an environment as supplemental staff is that you are there for an extended period, not just given a brief



**CLICK HERE** to hear Dr. Bowers’ thoughts on traditional interviews and why “try before you buy” is better.

tour. What’s more, you are treating patients, so you can conduct real-time assessments of the management style and philosophy, and determine first-hand whether it matches your criteria for a permanent job.

### TRY...AND TRY AGAIN

Before Rodney Trotter, MD, PhD, FAAP, signed on as a staff pediatric hospitalist at a Texas-based facility, he had fulfilled multiple contracts at the community hospital



RODNEY TROTTER,  
MD, PhD, FAAP

over a 3-year period. During his years as a full-time locum tenens physician, Dr. Trotter partnered with a handful of staffing firms, including Medical Doctor Associates, based in Atlanta, Ga. On each repeat contract, he learned more and more about the system, staff, and patient population, and he liked what he saw.

“After a few years of coming and going on locum tenens opportunities, I was approached by hospital executives to join the staff,” he says “They hoped to set up a Level II nursery. In order to do that, they





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**CLICK HERE** to hear whether Dr. Trotter would consider a permanent position without first trying it as a locum tenens practitioner.

needed 24/7 pediatric coverage and preferred to have someone in-house.”

Before he agreed, Dr. Trotter reflected on his experiences and whether he would enjoy settling in full-time. His comfort level needed to be met. After slightly more than a year on staff, though, the hospital shelved its plans to add the Level II nursery, and Dr. Trotter’s contract was not renewed. “That’s the downside of contracting directly,” he comments. “Generally, you do not run into that kind of situation as a locum tenens physician. You are in more control.”

For now, Dr. Trotter has resumed his mobile career.

### LIKE COMING HOME

Colette R. Whitby, MD, FACS, also appreciated the chance to try out a practice setting. Last year, she and her husband wished to return to her New England roots. So instead of immediately seeking a new hospital position, the surgeon agreed to her first locum tenens opportunity at a facility in



COLETTE R. WHITBY,  
MD, FACS

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the Bay State. The contract was arranged by Barton Associates, a national locum tenens company headquartered in Peabody, Mass.

“I liked the idea that I could live in my home state taking care of a patient population I am familiar

However, after spending several weeks at the acute care facility, she changed her mind. “That other hospital was going through major changes within the administration, and the work here seemed more and more like something I fit well with.”



**CLICK HERE** to learn why Dr. Whitby decided to try locum tenens practice.

with,” she remembers. “The contract arrangements were handled so quickly and efficiently. It was an excellent experience.”

Meanwhile Dr. Whitby was in contact with another hospital for a possible permanent placement.

So when administrators inquired about her joining the staff permanently, Dr. Whitby readily agreed. “They had an opening and didn’t have a female general surgeon on staff, which was causing some women to go elsewhere. I thought the

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staff worked quite well together, and it had a good patient base with a lot of primary care physicians referring patients to the hospital, both of which were important factors to me. I felt like I had come home; I felt like this position was made for me.”

After wrapping up her temporary contract, Dr. Whitby took a brief break to attend to her personal affairs and permanently relocate. But soon enough, she was back on duty. “It was as if I had not even left,” she says. “I had patients lined up for surgery and appointments set for follow-up. Nothing had changed from when I was a locum tenens doctor.”

### FUTURE FOCUS

Regardless of whether you hope to land a permanent job with your first locum tenens opportunity or are

keeping your options open, one of the keys to making it work in your favor is to keep communication flowing with your company representatives. Do not let it come as a surprise that you decide to sign on full-time. Moreover, if your staffing firm knows you are looking for opportunities that present permanent potential, they can convey your intention to clients and perhaps initiate the working interview.

“When consulting with physicians, we try to identify their long-term plans,” says Joe Winings, Senior Director for Onward MD, a staffing company located in Englewood, Colo. “That way, we are able to represent them appropriately.”

Of course, circumstances evolve; you may not start off wishing to go



JOE WININGS,  
SENIOR DIRECTOR



**CLICK HERE** to see what Winings has to say about the number of physicians who use locum tenens opportunities to try out different settings and locations before going permanent.

permanent, but change your mind along the way. In that case, Winings suggests notifying all parties as soon as possible so the logistics of a temp-to-perm conversion can get underway. “A good staffing company will be consulting with their providers throughout the course of a contract, and it is important to let us know about changes.”

The demand created by the deepening physician shortage is bound to drive up the average

number of offers doctors receive. At the same time, those exact circumstances will generate more need for locum tenens services, and therefore, more opportunities to conduct working interviews. **LL**

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