

Career Transitions

Benefits of working as a locum doctor as a career transition strategy

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If you haven't thought about being a rural locum you should, and if you have, here's why you're right!

Robin Jerome discusses the benefits of working as a locum doctor as a career transition strategy.

Even while our regional, rural and remote communities continue to grow, the demand for medical services has never been greater. A Google search for “rural locum needs” quickly demonstrates the worsening shortage of doctors in non-metro hospitals throughout Australia.

Desperate Local Health Districts are left with no choice but to staff their hospitals with agency locums. Look at the \$27 Million recently budgeted in Tasmania for locum staffing to show how doctor shortage has led to a reliance on locums. This is almost the double the \$15 million budgeted only two years previously in 2014/15.

The federal government is increasingly moving towards creating incentives for our metro doctors to commit time to working regional, remote and rural locum work. Doctors clearly understand their responsibility to their own patients' health, but perhaps discussion about the health of Australia as a whole would suggest that some kind of rotation in regional and rural areas could be part of the job description of metro doctors.

Australia needs doctors, but doctors too can reap significant benefits from working as a locum especially as a pathway for career transition. Here are three ways;

1. **Become a Registrar:** Transition from a trainee doctor into a Registrar role. A period of intensive locum work refining your skills may help you secure your chosen residency.
2. **Become a Specialist/Consultant:** Transition into your new role as a newly qualified Specialist/Consultant. You want to open your own clinic, but have very little experience working as a Specialist.
3. **Stay Relevant:** Perhaps you're ending your full-time career and are looking at retirement options. Why not top off your career with travel and giving back to society.

In any of these three scenarios, operating as a locum can serve as the perfect pathway in your career transition plan. Reports of our city doctors just not getting enough hands-on experience working their city jobs are resulting in them becoming rusty in new protocols and procedures. One surgeon recently told me that to keep his skills relevant, he periodically took locum shifts in the country where a single 12-hour shift would yield more work than many cumulative weeks of work in the big smoke.

This synergistic relationship between city doctors and rural health communities is how our public health system can survive and, indeed, thrive.

Whilst there are too many scenarios, circumstances and specialties to cover in this article, some of the benefits of working as a locum include;

- Getting real hands on experience.
- Broadening and diversifying your skill set.
- Supporting our rural & regional communities.

- Earning extra money - Locum specialists typically earn \$2000-\$2500 per day, with all travel, accommodation and car hire included.
- Visiting remote and picturesque parts of Australia you would never normally visit. From Byron Bay to Broken Hill to Bendigo to Bunbury; the options are quite remarkable.
- Building your professional network. This is often overlooked as just what an amazing opportunity it is to build a professional network with hospitals and DMS's throughout the various hospitals & states.

Once you begin to realise that working as a locum could really help your career, in particular with transitions, you'll have some questions. I've found the most common are;

What paper work will I need to complete?

It's actually pretty simple. Step 1, Personal Info: you need an up to date CV and 2 relevant referees. Step 2, Credentialing: This is dependent on the state or territory we place you into, but you only need to do it once and it means showing standard documents including checking ID, medical degree certificates and a few other essential documents such as the working with children check.

Who pays for my costs?

Unless commutable from your home, nearly all hospitals we work with will pay for flights, accommodation and car hire.

How long must I commit for?

A locum contract can be as short as 3-4 days or as long as 6 months or even longer in some instances. You simply need to follow through on what you commit to. Many hospitals will fill a month-long shift with various locums in order to have all the dates covered, so don't worry if you only want to commit to a week or two whilst you experiment working as a locum.

Can I bring my spouse or pet?

Many locums use the opportunity to bring their partner and treat the locum work as a mini holiday during the periods they're not on call. We also have doctors who have taken their pets with them and indeed we've secured appropriate accommodation in these instances.

Can I be paid through my own company?

Yes. Many of the locums prefer to work through their own Pty Ltd Companies, and some would rather be paid as a PAYG employee of the hospital.

These are frequently asked questions, although there are of course many other queries. The pertinent point to understand is that there are thousands of doctors working as locums every single day in Australia. This is a well-oiled machine; all your questions have will have been asked by many people and answered in ways appropriate to your situation. However, there is one essential question that needs answering.

How do I find a locum contract?

This is where ZEEP Medical come into the mix. You would have an initial 'discovery' chat where we will find out your grade, specialty and medical experience and discuss your requirements for a locum contract. These will most importantly include where you might like to work and the length of contact you can commit to, but can include any questions you have about the locum experience.

Post discovery, your personal ZEEP Medical consultant will take 2 references and work with you on an agreeable locum contract. Whilst varying according to state, the final paper work is always required before you start your contract.

For more information on working as a locum please contact Robin Jerome, Managing Partner at ZEEP Medical on 02 8379 4001 or email him directly to robin@zeepmedical.com.au With more than 20 years experience, he is one of the most senior and experienced recruiters in Australia.