Tips and Info on Locuming as a GP

Contributed by Duncan Walling, Aug 2010
Updated by Laura Edwards 2014.

I started working as a locum GP in February 2010 after having become a partner straight from my GP Registrar year almost 5 years previously. I left the partnership to go and work as a Medical Director for the LMC. I thought it may be useful to share my experience as a Locum GP and some of the ways that you need to organise yourself.

The first thing to do is to register as self employed which can be done over the phone, 0845 915 4515, or online at the hmrc website.

Pension forms

This is the area that I was most unsure about before starting but if you are organised it is fairly straightforward to do once you have done it the first time. I found that my local Area Team pensions department (e.g. S.B.S) were really helpful over the phone when I filled mine out for the first time.

You essentially have to submit a Part A form for every period worked at a surgery. If it is a continuous period at a practice and if your work doesn’t cross a calendar month then you need only submit one form. You have to fill out the first part and then I normally left the form with the practice manager and they will send it in to you.

I soon realised that I should carry plenty of blank form A’s with me as well as some blank invoices where I could fill in basic details such as amount, hours worked and practice.

Once you have all the form A’s for a month returned to you then you should fill out a part B form. This is the form that looks daunting. I fill mine out electronically. This has to be submitted before 10 weeks have elapsed since you did the work. You essentially complete all the details of the part a forms onto this form and then add them up and take a percentage depending on the amount you estimate you will earn this year. It can be complicated especially if you contribute to added years and this is where I found the pensions department to be invaluable as they work with these forms every day. You then send this off with a cheque for your contribution to your local pct.

Getting work

Currently there is plenty of demand for GP locums. There are many different ways of advertising yourself and you could join a locums agency. I found local practices through NHS choices and then rang them. The receptionists often gave me an email address and then I could send a covering email and my CV. Once you work in a few places you can quickly build up a regular group of practices that you work at.

General Advice

Some of this is obvious but good principles none the less.

You have to be organized I keep 2 copies of my diary, one paper one on my phone which is
synchronised with outlook. This is probably overkill but you need to keep good records of where you have arranged to go and where and how long you have worked. It is really embarrassing to double book or forget a session.

Be nice to receptionists and all other staff. It is obvious but it is amazing how the simple things can then make your job a whole lot easier and will make it so much more likely that they will call you back.

Don’t be afraid to call practices to check on patients. Practices are normally more than happy for you to do this and it is an important part of learning in general practice. Record this and any reflections as part of your PDP towards revalidation.

When going on visits you need to ask for practice prescription paper then remember to give it back before you leave.

I carry a bag with most of what I need with me but my first checks at a new practice are:

1. Where are fit notes
2. How do I do blood forms and what is the practice code
3. How do I do X Rays and referrals

I have an excel spreadsheet with dates, hours worked, amount invoiced, miles done: to, from the practice and any visit mileage (you need it for your tax return) and if I have received payment & pension forms. You do need to sometimes chase practices.

You could also look online for locum organisers which for a modest fee helps you keep track of everything. e.g. www.locumorganiser.com

You will need an accountant and there are plenty of medical accountants around that will give you good advice. Record every expense that is work related and they can then advise you on what you can claim for and what you can’t. Most accountants will send you a spreadsheet that indicated what can be claimed towards work related expenses. Look t this as rules are different for those who are self employed - it is worth your while realising in advance what things are eligable and therefore you need to keep receipts.

The clinical systems are quite different but if the system is new to you I have always found practices are happy to meet with you if you arrange to turn up early and get them to run through it with you.

Try and join a locum group. They are useful to discuss difficult cases and this is then useful to record towards revalidation. You should try and get in the habit of recording any learning or reflections. If you attend any practice meetings record it. Revalidation and the audits and critical incident learning is more difficult for locum GPs but may not be to onerous if you bear it in mind and are organised.

Please have a look at our guide to revalidation for sessional GPs.

I hope this is useful and please get in touch through the office or our website if you can add anything or have any questions.

Useful NHS pension website with link to the forms to download:

NASGP National Association of Sessional GPs: http://www.nasgp.org.uk/

I did find their website useful. You have to register with them, which is about £80-90. There are useful hints about different computer systems and the pension forms are all downloadable also in a useful excel format.

Sulisdoc

Sulisdoc aims to support Sessional GPs by:-

1. Allowing networking and communication between members
2. Advertising employment opportunities from surrounding Practices.
3. Working with the Local Educational Organisation to address the educational needs of SGPs.
4. Forming a body of representation for SGPs in political matters such as local Commissioning.
If you are a Sessional GP in the Bath/Wilshire area, they would like to hear from you.

For more information visit their website at www.sulisdoc.co.uk or email them at sulisdoc@gmail.com.

Further useful documentation

What can the LMC do for Locum / Sessional GPs?

BMA Guidance on Locum Agreement 2011 - excellent guide for Locums and practices with guidance on what locums should expect from practices and what practices should expect from practices.

Practice Pack for GP Locums

GP Locum Pack

Locum Superannuation - the enclosed BMA document provides general guidance for locums and practices on locum employer’s pension contribution.

Locum Superannuation Invoice

BMA Guide to the White Paper for Sessional GPs

BMA Guide to how to set up a Sessional group

A guide to GP locum induction and Support, with Room tour - This video explains the importance of GP locum induction and how to provide an effective induction to a locum who has not worked in your practice before. It is created with practice managers in mind.