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Angie Kanazeh

Michigan Dental Association, akanazeh@michigandental.org

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Locum Tenens Dentists: You May Need One, or You May Be One

By Angie Kanazeh
MDA Director of Membership

Throughout your career, circumstances sometimes arise that may force you to be out of your office for an extended period. To keep your office open and running, you may need to look for temporary help: a *locum tenens* dentist. In Latin, locum tenens means “to hold the place of.” In dentistry, a locum tenens dentist is someone who temporarily fulfills duties of another dentist when the dentist is absent, or even when a practice is short-staffed.

Many MDA members have contacted the MDA staff with questions about locum tenens dentistry. As a practitioner, you may find yourself needing the services of a locum tenens dentist. Or, you may wish to serve as a locum tenens dentist yourself. This article will give you more information about both of these situations.

From the hiring dentist’s perspective

Obviously there are many things to consider when hiring a locum tenens dentist. For example — is doing so a fiscally sound business decision? Is it the right decision in terms of the overall well-being of the patients in your practice? And, of course, is the locum dentist licensed to practice in Michigan?

From a business perspective, both the dental office and the temporary dentist need to be clear on which dental benefit companies the temporary dentist participates with, and with which insurers the office wants the temporary dentist to participate. If you’re an in-network provider, it’s a good idea to hire a locum tenens dentist who

is in the same network plans as you are. You’ll need to complete the proper forms and paperwork as required by the dental insurance plans, and get the locum tenens dentist properly credentialed for all your network plans. Also, the locum tenens dentist should be listed as the treating dentist on the dental claim form. The billing dentist or dental entity could be the dentist who is out on disability.

The temporary dentist needs to have his or her own malpractice insurance, or may need to be added to the policy of the office where he or she will be working. The two parties also need to agree on compensation, either a fixed amount or determined on a variable basis. This agreement should be in place before any services are performed and billed, and you should consult an attorney familiar with health care law to draw up this document.

Finally, make sure all of your insurance policies are current and up to date. And if you’re using a locum tenens agency, make sure it is a reputable firm, and ask for references. It’s also a good idea to talk with colleagues who have hired a locum tenens dentist to learn from their experiences.

Serving as a locum tenens dentist: Is it right for you?

There’s a definite need in the marketplace for dentists willing to serve temporarily in order to support dentists who require assistance in their practice. And, there are many benefits and opportunities for those practicing as a

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There’s a growing need for dentists to serve in a temporary capacity in a practice where a dentist needs to take time off for health, business, personal, or other reasons. Here’s what you need to know about finding a *locum tenens* dentist — or becoming one yourself.



Locum Tenens

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locum tenens dentist. Some of these opportunities and benefits include:

Flexibility: As a locum tenens dentist, you have the freedom to choose when and where you want to work. You can take on assignments that fit your schedule and personal preferences, allowing better work-life balance. You also have the flexibility to choose your working hours and take time off between assignments.

Variety of experiences: Working as a locum tenens dentist allows you to gain a wide range of experiences by working in different dental offices and with different patient popula-

tions. If you enjoy traveling, it provides opportunities to work in different cities, allowing you to explore new places while practicing dentistry.

Expand your network: As a locum tenens dentist, you have the chance to build relationships and network with other dental professionals in different locations. This can lead to valuable connections and potential future job opportunities.

Financial benefits: Locum tenens dentists often have the potential to earn higher hourly rates compared to permanent dentists. Additionally, a locum tenens dentist may have the opportunity to work in areas with higher demand, which can lead to increased earning potential.

Test different practice settings:

Becoming a locum tenens dentist allows you to test different practice settings without committing to a long-term position. For a new dentist, this can help you determine the type of practice environment that suits you best before making a permanent career decision.

Consider what you want

The reasons for becoming a locum tenens dentist may vary from individual to individual, and it's essential to consider your own personal and professional goals before making a decision. Sometimes a locum tenens dentist may be a younger practitioner, but often it's a great fit for a retired or semi-retired dentist as well. As Dr. Jerry Kohen, a veteran practitioner and also a member of the MDA Board of Trustees who has worked as a locum tenens dentist, says, "I've been contacted by dentist friends, acquaintances, and head hunters from staffing companies to be a locum tenens dentist. I've helped offices more than a dozen times and had positive experiences almost every time, and staff and patients were usually very appreciative and thankful."

Dr. Sue Carron, also a veteran practitioner, has enjoyed working as a locum tenens dentist too, after selling her own practice. Here's what she says:

"I started working as a locum tenens dentist after I sold my practice," she says. "My brain and body needed a change, but I missed connecting with patients and being social. I've helped out with multiple maternity leaves, a vacation leave, and two long-term coverages of more than a year. The benefits include augmenting my income, seeing people, working with new staff, parents, and children, and keeping up with the advancements in dentistry."

She continues, "I've worked in offices that had a formal contract and others that offered a per diem fee. I always went in before I started work-

Hiring a Locum Tenens Dentist: Some Smart Tips to Consider

Dr. Margaret Gingrich, a former MDA president who is also a solo practitioner, utilized the services of a locum tenens dentist during medical and maternity leaves. Here are some of her suggestions:

- Start looking as soon as you know when you'll need to be out. Once you've secured a provider, ask if they can extend their time if needed, in the event of complications or other circumstances that result in a longer leave of absence.

- Know what you feel comfortable having the locum tenens dentist doing. Will they do all procedures or just certain ones? Make sure your staff knows how to schedule accordingly and consider scheduling longer appointment times for the temporary dentist since they aren't used to your office and staff.

- Make it clear that everyone understands how payment is to be handled. Payment to the dentist is usually by the hour, paid by the day (set amount), or by production. If you're hiring directly, talk with your accountant about tax implications.

- Make sure the locum tenens dentist has malpractice insurance and can extend it to your facility. Contact your carrier to see if the dentist can be covered with a rider.

- Find out what insurances the dentist participates with and work on additional credentialing if necessary.

- Plan on losing some money during this time. The goal is to keep your office open, take care of patients, and not be overwhelmed when you get back to your practice.



Gingrich

Locum Tenens Help from the MDA: The COVER Program

Whether it is maternity leave, unexpected injury, planned surgery, medical treatment, or any other leave of absence from your practice — or if you are considering becoming a locum tenens dentist — the MDA's Colleagues Offering Varied Emergency Relief (COVER) Program can help.

The COVER Program is a members-only service providing dentists with a statewide list of colleagues who have expressed interest in providing temporary coverage. If you would like access to the list of participants or if you are interested in joining the MDA COVER Program to provide temporary coverage, visit michigandental.org/COVER or email the MDA Membership Department at membership@michigandental.org. Or, call the MDA at 800-589-2632 and ask for a member of the membership staff.

ing to meet the staff and see how the office ran with the dentist I was covering, as well as shared my preferences with staff." It's not all roses, however: "Some of the challenges include the commute, being away from family, and learning new programs and dental materials."

Again, if you're interested in being a locum tenens dentist, you may find it helpful to talk with others like Dr. Kohen and Dr. Carron who have firsthand experience. They can be a great resource. Much useful information also can be found on the MDA website, including a helpful frequently-asked-questions document. You can visit michigandental.org/Locum-tenens to learn more. There's also a webinar on locum tenens dentistry, plus other resources, on the ADA website at ada.org.

* * *

As I hope this brief article has shown, there's definitely a need out there for locum tenens dentists, and the demand seems to be growing. It's good to familiarize yourself with this aspect of dentistry. You never know when you may need some temporary help — or whether you might be in the position to provide that help yourself. ●

About the Author

Angie Kanazeh is the MDA's director of membership. She has served on the MDA staff since 2017, supervising the MDA's membership recruitment and retention team and assisting MDA members with answers to their questions and concerns. She also coordinates the MDA's membership marketing activities, is a frequent speaker at dental school events, and staffs the MDA's membership and new dentist committees. Contact her at akanazeh@michigandental.org. For general membership questions, email membership@michigandental.org.



Kanazeh



MDA COVER PROGRAM

Colleagues Offering Varied
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Learn more at
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