Physician Locum Services Update

Presentation to
2012 Physician - Community Connections Conference
October 11, 2012
Physician Locum Services Update

- **Program Overview**
  - History, mission, eligibility, benefits.

- **Program Operation**
  - Day-to-day operations, service statistics.

- **Locum Physician Profile – who locums?**
  - Encouraging return of locums -> retention of rural drs.

- **Feedback from Locum and Rural Physicians**
  - Appeal of program
  - Complaints
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- Program Overview:
  - Rural Locum Program (RLP) created in 1992.
  - Among recommendations from Task Force on Rural Health Care to address rural health service issues.
  - Primary goal – retention of rural physicians.
  - Regular Program (office+evening/weekend call, initial program offering)
  - Expansion: weekend & specialist programs.
  - Ongoing evaluations indicate locum service is a significant factor in retaining rural Alberta physicians.
Program Overview:

Mission

“...replacement locum-physician services for family physicians and specialists in rural/regional Alberta.”

- Replacement: vacation, CME, illness, reasonable call.
- Supplement local resources when away or “short”, or as a recruitment aid.
- Locum coverage is an AMA Member benefit.
Program Overview:

Goal:

“...create and maintain an environment that encourages retention of rural physicians by improving their personal lifestyle.”

- Allow rural physicians/specialists time away from practice.
- Reduce/eliminate on call service for senior physicians.
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- Program Overview:
  4 Programs:
  Family Physicians:
  - Regular (Short-term); Weekend* & Seniors Weekend* Locum Programs
  Specialists:
  - Specialist Locum Program.

* Indicates RPAP-funded program
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- Program Overview:
  Program is overseen by the Physician Locum Services Steering Committee:
  - Recommendations on program policies.
  - Representation from Alberta Health, AMA, GP & specialist locums, rural physician and regional specialist groups, and RPAP.
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Program Overview:
Where Is Locum Coverage Provided?

- Regular (Short-term) Locum Program (REG):
  - eligibility: communities with fewer than five physicians.
  - each (AMA member) physician is eligible for four weeks of locum coverage per year.
  - office with evening/weekend emergency room (on-call) coverage – single or multiple weeks.
  - rural physician receives overhead payment – general office costs, locum-related costs, accommodation.
  - time away from practice with limited impact on colleagues or patients.

* Indicates RPAP-funded program.
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- Program Overview:
  - Weekend Locum Program (WKD)*:
    - eligibility: communities with fewer than four physicians.
    - weekend emergency room coverage: generally Fri. 5PM to Mon. 8AM.
    - relief so rural physicians are on call no greater frequency than one-in-four weekends.

* Indicates RPAP-funded program.
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- **Program Overview:**
  - **Seniors Weekend Locum Program (SWK)**:
    - Senior retention; option to decrease/eliminate weekend hospital call.

**Eligibility:**
- Physicians older than 54 years of age.
- Have practiced in rural Alberta more than nine years.
- Communities with fewer than 16 physicians.

* Indicates RPAP-funded program
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Program Overview:

Specialist Locum Program (SPEC):

- Other centres by application: High River (OBS), Camrose (GS, PEDS & OBS), Edson, Hinton & Wetaskiwin (DRAD).
- Core services: Anesthesia, Obstetrics, General Surgery, Internal Medicine & Pediatrics.
- Other services based on requests/locum availability: e.g. Urology, Orthopedics, Psychiatry, Plastic Surgery, Neurology, Radiology...
Program Overview: Service

Service Provision Statistics 2011/12:
- Days of locum relief:
  - GPs: 4307 (1252 assignments – REG/WKD/SWK)
  - Specialists: 3206 (525 assignments)
- Number of communities serviced: 69 (GP), 11 (SPEC)
- Number of physicians requesting service: 148 (GP), 52 (SPEC)
- Numbers of active locums (> 1 assignment):
  - GPs: 140
  - Specialists: 141
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- Program Overview: Service

Who Provides Locum Service?
- Recently-graduated residents;
- Fellows/R3s, while pursuing additional training;
- Practicing physicians seeking variety/skills retention;
- Full-time locum physicians;
- Senior “physicians” easing into reduced practice/retirement.
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- Appeal of Program (to locum physicians):
  - Guaranteed minimum income: estimate of minimum income for assignment.
  - Flexibility: locums have full choice in selecting assignments; suits locums’ lifestyles/availability.
  - Payment of Expenses: travel, accommodation.
  - Variety: different sites and experiences; e.g. new grads experience communities before settling.
  - Convenience - full service by PLS: paperwork, privileges & bookings completed by PLS staff.
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Program Overview: Daily Operations

- Locums join PLS under contract with no term or minimum number of assignments; added to roster & email lists.
- Locums provide availability with up to 4 months notice.
- Eligible rural physicians submit requests with up to 4 months notice and ongoing.
- Block scheduling 3 times per year, plus request list is emailed to locums frequently/daily.
- Locums select assignments & request booking
- PLS staff book assignments, travel, & send documentation; Rural Dr/Zone books accommodation.
Program Overview: Daily Operations

- Paperwork facilitated by PLS.
- Payments each week once assignment documentation is submitted.
- Additional payments when AH FFS payments & AH on call funds are received.
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Program Overview: Benefits

- Guaranteed daily minimum income payment
- Travel expenses fully or partially paid
- Travel honoraria of $500 to $1,000 per assignment
- Accommodation provided
- All bookings, hospital privileges, commercial travel and financial tasks administered by the AMA
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How To Invite/Encourage Locums to Return to Your Community:

1. Positive Experience for Locum Physician at Locum Site.
2. Locum Physician Returns to Locum Site.
3. Additional Time Away from Practice for Rural Physician.
4. Increased Satisfaction for Rural Physician.
5. Retention of Rural Physician.
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What experiences at particular locum sites cause you to return to those sites? (please check all responses that apply)

- Positive Interaction/Relationship with Local Facility/Office Staff
- Distance to Locum Site from Home
- Income
- Patient Volumes/"busyness" of site
- Positive Interaction/Relationship with Local Physicians
- Quality of Accommodation
- Good Quality of Documentation/Patient Records
- Equipment/Local Processes or Operations
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- **Complaints/Dissatisfaction (from locum physicians):**
  - **Accommodation:** does not meet locum expectations or previous experience.
  - **Poor orientation or support by local staff; resources missing** - cell phone, pager, passwords - locum feels “lost”.
  - **Communication breakdown/ misunderstandings:** experience different than pre-assignment discussion (greater call, etc.); locum practice different from local processes.
  - **Conflict with local staff.**
  - **Patient volumes** - too slow or too busy.
  - **Cancellation by rural physician:** especially with short notice.
How To Invite/Encourage Locums to Return to Your Community:

- **Make the Locum Physician Feel Welcome:** orientation, connection with staff, passwords, cell phone...
- **Make the Locum Physician Feel Appreciated:** service is valued.
- **Comfortable, Private Accommodation:** meet locum expectations or previous experience; accommodate spouse/family.
- **Identify Resources For Use If The Locum Has Difficulty:** people to call with questions or to address issues (clinical, accommodation, back-up, etc.).
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- **Appreciation of Locum Service (by rural physicians):**
  
  “RLP is an essential program for rural physicians. I could not stay rural without the program”

  “This program is one of the reasons that I will continue to practice a longer period of time vs. totally retiring”

  “If it was not for RLP there would be no doctors in rural Alberta.”
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- Complaints/Dissatisfaction:
  - Take-away message: create an environment where locums like to work = return visits by locums; retention of rural physicians; possible recruitment of locum physician looking for long-term practice option.
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   https://www.albertadoctors.org/services/physicians/practice-help/pls

   Thank you.