Thriving as a GP locum
A new episode in your career is just about to begin.

The National Association of Sessional GPs was founded in 1997 by 14 GP locums who all recognised the professional isolation of working independently in different practices, often in conditions that they had not anticipated during the protected years of our training and partnerships.

Back then, GP locums weren’t even allowed to contribute to the NHS pension scheme, so that was first on our list.

So here, we’ve put together everything any GP needs to know about stepping into the exciting world of GP locuming. And we do really mean that. It can be a real thrill to explore new geographical areas, working in lots of different premises, helping out struggling practices, seeing thousands of different patients, giving your personal slant on their care, tweaking or reinforcing their existing management where necessary.

You’ll see that throughout, as well as explaining how to do all this yourself, we also refer to LocumDeck, our online locum management platform, that is packed with tools that take away a lot of the technical hurdles of being a GP locum, and replace it with really useful features to make sure you’re in full control of your very own locum practise.
Table of contents

Start assembling your paperwork 5
  Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. 6
  Occupational health 6

Ensure the Performers List is updated with your details 7
  England 7
  Wales 8
  Scotland 8
  Northern Ireland 8

Update your medical indemnity cover 9

Tax, national insurance and accountancy 10

Get your gear together 11
  Work calendar 11
  Satnav or similar smartphone mapping app 11
  Usual basic kit generally expected 11
  Useful items that are often missing from consulting rooms 12
  Other essentials if doing home visits 12
  Drug bag 13

Finding work, and helping practices find you 16
  Choices of channels for arranging work 18
    Locum agencies for short-term locuming - but beware Trojan Horses 18
    Independent GP locuming for longer-term locuming in a specific area 19
    Locum chambers for portfolio careers 20

Agreeing terms and booking process 22
  Finding out about the practice and the circumstances of the booking 22

Defining work 23
  Time-based 23
  Workload-based 23

Agreeing the type of work 24
  Core work 24
  Other extra work 25
  Any special enhanced services 25

How to set your pay rates 26
  Other factors that may affect your rates 26
  Bringing this all together 27

How to actually make and manage your own bookings 29
  Reactive approach 29
  Proactive approach 30

On the day of your GP locum session 31

Getting pay and pension 33
  Update your pension record with your new locum status 33

Generating Invoices and pension forms 34
  Invoices 34
  Generating your GP Locum A pension forms 35
  Sending your invoices and any GP Locum A pension forms 35
  Tracking your payments and completed Locum Form As. 35
  To pay your NHS pension contribution 36
  When should I generate a GP Locum B form? 36
Other key information you will need to complete your GP Locum B form 36
When to send your completed GP Locum B forms and payment 36
Where to send it 37
Financial record keeping 38
How to keep adequate records 38

Feedback and appraisal 39
Portable GP locum learning system 39
Colleagues for fun and support 39
Sources of support 41
Stay in touch 41
Nationally 41
Locally 41
Sample

Read the rest, and help support the work of the NASGP at the same time, by signing up to the NASGP for only £11 per month.

Membership also includes

- Completely free use of LocumDeck’s online invoicing and paperless pension forms.
- Full access to the NASGP website
- Bi-monthly magazine
- Full access to AppraisalAid

And much much more.

Simply join at www.nasgp.org.uk/join and return to The Art of GP Locuming page to sign in and download the full document.
Start assembling your paperwork

Store paper and electronic copies of all your relevant documents ready for practices to easily access

Here’s our checklist based on CQC’s guidance to practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CQC advice</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proof of being a GP</td>
<td>Copy of medical degree and completion of GP training (if issued to you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical indemnity</td>
<td>Copy of your certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMC registration</td>
<td>Your GMC number (also in your CV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performers List</td>
<td>Copy of your certificate (and is proof you’re a GP if you weren’t originally given a certificate of completion of training and of valid DBS check)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof of identity including a recent photograph</td>
<td>NHS smartcard or driving licence or passport, NHS smartcard or driving licence or passport, or use a service like Yoti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory evidence of conduct in previous employment concerned with the provision of health or social care; or children or vulnerable adults</td>
<td>At least one recent (within last year) reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory documentary evidence of any relevant qualification</td>
<td>A copy of your medical degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A full employment history together with a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment</td>
<td>Your CV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such other information as is required under any enactment to be kept by the registered person in relation to such persons employed</td>
<td>DBS check - NASGP advice is that for temporary self-employed locums evidence of being on a Performers List will suffice (see separate CQC advice).</td>
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Finding work, and helping practices find you

There are many routes to finding work, each with their pros and cons. In the current climate, there is no shortage of work, and you will probably find that once you make it known you are available, by whatever route, you will be inundated with enquiries. It can be tempting, when faced with an empty calendar and/or an empty bank account, to accept everything on a first-come, first served basis. Our advice here is simple. Don’t!

Before you start accepting work, ask yourself some important questions: Why am I locuming? What are my plans, and what do I want to get out of GP locuming? What’s most important to me?

The answers to these questions will help you determine the best route for you to find and book work, and running through that decision should be a consideration that not all doctors are good at - the concept of looking after yourself.
Agreeing terms and booking process

If you’re working through an agency or some of the online platforms or a locum chamber, a lot of this may be taken out of your hands. So what follows is mainly for freelance GP locums.

Clearly agreed terms or work, communicated in writing, is one of the key steps to ensuring a safe locum session. There is huge variability in how different practices and locums work, so being precise and specific about what you are expecting to do is very important. Here are some pointers on developing your own booking process.

Finding out about the practice and the circumstances of the booking

First, work out whether you are familiar with their clinical IT system. If not, is the IT system a deal breaker or are you willing to have a pre-session induction? Are the practice willing to offer this?

Next try and establish why the practice needs locum cover. It’s good to know for several reasons; there is a big difference between a practice seeking cover for study leave and a struggling practice having to backfill a GP who may been suffering with months of stress and burnout before taking long-term sick leave. More caution may be needed in the latter case and it’s good to know what has been communicated to patients.
Sample

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On the day of your GP locum session

The deal you make with a practice when they book you is that you will arrive with the most precious and valuable asset in primary care - that’s you, and your knowledge and skill as a GP. The practice’s side of the deal, if they want to enable you to perform at your best, is that they should provide you with access to basic, reasonable levels of equipment and information about practice processes so that you can run a safe and efficient surgery. It is amazing how the cumulative effect of seemingly small omissions - starting late because you couldn’t find a parking space, the missing computer log in, no soap in the consulting room, not knowing how to organise a chest x-ray, not understanding the repeat prescribing system - can become major obstacles, which waste time and increase the chances of error and lapses in care.

- Check the practice’s parking facilities before you arrive.
- Make it part of your T&Cs that they have a computer log in arrangements ready for when you arrive.
- Direct them to a copy of NASGP’s Pre-arrival Checklist [www.nasgp.org.uk/question/spip-pre-arrival-checklist/](http://www.nasgp.org.uk/question/spip-pre-arrival-checklist/)
- Insist on a practice induction pack - we think NASGP’s Standardised Practice Information Portal (Spip) is easily the most comprehensive and easiest to update resource out there.
- Arrange to have a brief induction tour of the building for when you arrive, and identify a member of staff who can be your point of contact for any queries

  - This allows you to check out the basic facilities - locks on doors, loos, where to get a drink - but also a quick hello with key members of staff on duty.

  - Some practices offer this automatically, and this is usually a very good marker that this is a well-sorted practice, worth working in again.

  - For those that don’t offer this, gently encouraging them to show you around and pointing out how helpful this is may help the practice develop this tour in future.
Getting pay and pension

NASGP was instrumental in obtaining access to the NHS pension scheme (NHSPS) for freelance GP locums and it is a great prize. But crikey - its mechanisms and ways can confuse the best of us, and is one of the reasons we developed LocumDeck to simplify and automate it as much as possible. Since your pension is linked to your pay, we’ve bundled this together with your pay in this section.

Update your pension record with your new locum status

This is linked to updating the Performers List.

What, you may ask, does the Performers List have to do with your pension record?

The Performers List is an NHS assurance to the public that you are of good standing and up to date with training. Your Area Team or Health Board branch of the performers list is responsible for providing your appraisal, and is headed by a Responsible Officer (RO) who decides whether you’re fit to work and makes recommendations to the GMC about your revalidation. BUT the administrative side of the Performers List overlaps with your pension administration.

So, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, your employer contribution for your pension is paid by the organisation whose performers list you are on. In England & Wales, though the employer contribution is paid by the practice direct to the GP locum, your host Area team or Health Board will still need to be informed of your GP locum status so they can detach your pension record from any practice where you may have previously been working.
Feedback and appraisal

Once you’ve got a robust booking and invoicing system ticking over nicely, it won’t be long before you have to start thinking about NHS appraisal and revalidation. In truth, you’re probably coming across so many learning needs everyday that your head may be starting to spin.

Don’t panic! We’ve all been there. In our humble NASGP experience, there are two key things you need to keep you afloat…

Portable GP locum learning system

Part of the art of GP locuming is to develop a portable learning system that you can access from any location to hoover up all those learning needs, and refer back to your previous notes when you get stuck with a knowledge gap in a consultation. You’re building a second brain, meaning you can relax more - you won’t forget to look something up because it’s recorded; you won’t run out of ideas to build up your CPD credits or run a QIA because you’re in the habit of capturing learning points naturally every time you go to work.

Think about what method of collecting ideas, learning needs and new knowledge is going to work best for you. For some it may be paper notebooks in strategic locations. There are lots of IT solutions out there though currently the common online appraisal toolkits don’t really cut the mustard, being too clunky and difficult to retrieve learning notes in a hurry.

How to make your own personalised learning system

- At NASGP, our current favourite is using the Google drive document storage facility that you get as part of a free Gmail account - along with other locum-friendly tools e.g. email, calendar, spreadsheets, word etc.

- We like this so much that as part of NASGP’s AppraisalAid, you have the option of saving learning templates straight into your own google drive.

Colleagues for fun and support

The final, and perhaps most important step in the art of GP locuming, is guarding against isolation by maintaining regular contact with colleagues. Everything from the camaraderie of a brief chat with a GP partner in the...
Download the complete version of The Art of Locuming from the NASGP website www.nasgp.org.uk/the-art-of-locuming