

How locum tenens physicians compare to staff physicians in quality of care

Patients should receive the same quality of care whether they're being seen by a staff physician or a locum tenens provider. Two recent studies compared patient outcomes for locum tenens and employed physicians and found that outcomes were similar for both provider types. In addition, one study found that costs to the healthcare facility were lower for those patients being seen by locum tenens providers.

Treatment by locum tenens providers does not increase mortality rates

One study led by Harvard Medical School researchers examined mortality rates of almost two million Medicare beneficiaries hospitalized between 2009 and 2014. They found that those treated by locum tenens physicians had similar mortality rates as those treated by staff physicians.¹

The researchers also analyzed secondary outcomes, including readmission rates, costs of care, and length of stay. Patients cared for by locum tenens physicians had lower 30-day readmissions than those seen by staff physicians.

Care by locum physicians resulted in a lower 30-day readmission rate.

Locum tenens providers are associated with lower hospital costs

A second study conducted by the University of Toledo College of Medicine and ProMedica found that patients treated by locum tenens physicians had shorter hospital stays and lower hospital costs.²

The study also confirmed Harvard's study that mortality rates were similar whether a patient was treated by a locum tenens or staff physician.

Researchers also found that patients seen only by locum tenens were associated with an adjusted length of stay of one day shorter – with an adjusted average hospital cost saving of \$1,339 per hospitalization.

Care by locum physicians resulted in a 23% lower cost compared to staff hospitalists.

Locum tenens physicians provide quality care

As shown by these two studies, the quality of patient care provided by locum tenens physicians compares favorably to that of staff physicians, and in some cases is accompanied by lower costs and shorter hospitalizations.

These results should foster confidence in hospital systems and individual facilities that utilize locum tenens physicians as replacement services to cover gaps in coverage. Locum tenens physicians are as knowledgeable, skilled, and concerned about the quality of patient care they deliver as staff physicians.

CHG Healthcare can help you find quality physicians and advanced practice providers your organization needs. Call 866.588.5996 or email ecs.contact@chghealthcare.com for a consultation.

1. Blumenthal DM, Olenski AR, Tsugawa Y, Jena AB. Association Between Treatment by Locum Tenens Internal Medicine Physicians and 30-Day Mortality Among Hospitalized Medicare Beneficiaries. *JAMA*. 2017;318(21):2119-2129. doi:10.1001/jama.2017.17925.

2. Mustafa Ali, M.K., Sabha, M.M., Mustafa, S.K. et al. Hospitalization and Post-hospitalization Outcomes Among Teaching Internal Medicine, Employed Hospitalist, and Locum Tenens Hospitalist Services in a Tertiary Center: a Prospective Cohort Study. *J GEN INTERN MED* 36, 3040-3051 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-06578-4>.