“DON’T Sign Up To a GP Locum Agency Until You Read This Special Report...

(The Five ESSENTIAL Pillars For Building a Successful Sustainable Career As a Sessional or Locum GP Doctor...)

http://DrSimonWade.com

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“Helping Doctors Better Themselves”
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Your Rights and responsibilities

I am giving you full distribution rights to this report, you can share it with as many people as you would like, even sell it for whatever price you wish or give it as a valuable free gift. I’d rather you did the latter as I am freely giving away this valuable information to you.

I want this message to reach as many medical colleagues as possible who are considering sessional or GP locum work or are already in this subspecialty.

All I ask is that you do not edit or amend the contents in any way and thus fully respect me by keeping my authorship intact.

Even better – direct people to my site http://DrSimonWade.com where they can get this report and lots of other useful information.

Thank you.
Welcome

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to read this special report. I have been qualified as a medical doctor since 1986, and as a GP since 1990, and have done locum work since the summer of that year. If you are already doing or are considering GP locum or sessional work then the minutes spent reading this guide will be a great investment of your precious time, I promise.

I won’t waste any more of your valuable time talking about me, you can read about my story on my site http://DrSimonWade.com save to say I enjoy work as a locum especially since 2008, having worked as a full time partner in practice for 16 years until then. I have done GP locum work in New Zealand and Canada as well as the UK, don’t have any problems getting work and don’t need the services of a Locum Agency.

I have accumulated more than 10,000 hours in face to face consultations as a locum. Numerous colleagues have sought my advice and wisdom from my locum experiences and I am always happy and pleased to help a fellow doctor on the subject of locum work.
Foundations

Before we get into the details about the five essential pillars for your locum career, it’s important to consider the foundations. What you are going to build on is as, or more, important than those pillars, and deserves some effort of thought and consideration. It’s vital to your career and personal happiness and success that you are clear on your goals, aspirations and motivations.

What’s your ‘WHY’? Why do you want to do locum / sessional doctor work? How long for? Where? How busy do you want to be? What motivates you? Is it the money, the freedom, family or other considerations?

What inspires you? Do you have an ideal lifestyle goal that you aspire to achieve? What’s your knowledge of locum agencies and how they work? What’s your view on whether they are necessary or not, what are the advantages of using an agency, what are the disadvantages? What benefits from working outside of an agency, what challenges does that throw up? How do you manage uncertainty? What are your self confidence levels like? Your self-belief, is it in good shape?
Goal Setting

Many people do not take the time or make the mental effort to set goals for what they want to achieve in their career, let alone their life. Those who do set goals have a much greater chance of achieving them, and so feeling more successful and accomplished. That sounds much better than working without a plan. If you don’t have a goal, a target, you will have nothing to aim at. Having goals is an important part of your planning. And as the saying goes, if you don’t make your own plans, you’ll simply become part of someone else’s plans.

Your goals as a locum GP should be specific, not general, decide an actual amount you wish to earn and write it down, decide a specific time span over which you wish to achieve this, then put in place actions to make this measureable, weekly, monthly, yearly. You should have goals for the day, the week, the month, the year. The clearer you can be with stating your goals the higher the chance you will achieve them.

Having a strong desire, a commitment rather than a ‘want’ is much more powerful, and if you state your goals to yourself regularly, and even more powerful if you make a commitment to your goals to a trusted friend, partner or family member, studies have shown that by making yourself accountable you are significantly more likely to succeed.

There will be more information on goals and effective goal setting on the website soon.
Medical Locum Agencies

Doctor Locum Agency contracts can be reassuring if you are not confident of getting work through your own efforts, but you are giving up a certain level of control regarding where and when you go to work, and the chance of you having to travel further for work is much higher, so there is a time cost as well.

And if you are lacking self-confidence with your interview technique securing work through an agency removes that hurdle, unless the offer is for a more longer term attachment when the practice will most likely want to see you anyway for an interview before making any significant commitment.

Also as the agency will be taking a sizeable commission from the practice (at least 20% of the practice invoice for the locum work is taken by the agency for any agreed work) your potential earnings per session will be reduced.

There is almost always a ‘tie in’ in the agency contract, whereby once the locum agency has supplied you to work at a particular practice, any future work you do at that same practice will have to be invoiced through the locum agency.

There is a perception amongst more than a few colleagues that when a doctor comes to do a session of work via an agency they become more anonymous being referred to by staff as ‘the locum’. Contrast that with the personalised contact when you approach a practice and secure the locum / sessional work
through your own efforts. The practice are then dealing with you directly, rather than them dealing with an agency, you are on equal terms with the practice manager or partner who is negotiating with you rather than being ‘a worker supplied by the agency’.

This subtle but vital difference can do a lot of good, or harm, to your own self-belief and self-confidence, as well as your bank balance, depending on which route you take. Practices, in my experience always value an individual approach much more positively than dealing with an agency. The latter is often seen as the route of last resort for securing sessional or locum doctor services.

**GP Locum Chambers and Sessional GP Support Groups**

There have in recent years been the evolution of support groups for GP locum and sessional freelance GPs, first championed by the founder and CEO of The National Association of Sessional GPs, (NASGP), Dr Richard Fieldhouse, who himself set up a ‘chambers’ for locum GPs to help with organisation of work, mutual support, preventing isolation, as well as organising activities to support revalidation and accountability. Some groups are run commercially with a business manager, there are costs involved in being part of such a chamber and you probably need to be invited rather than simply apply to join. Other support groups (sessional GP Support Groups) exist on a looser level and are aimed at mutual support more than anything else, quite a lot arrange educational meetings which can help with Continuing Professional Development and revalidation preparation.

The following links are provided for more information...

NASGP website  [http://www.nasgp.org.uk](http://www.nasgp.org.uk)

Dr Ian Fieldhouse’s article on why he set up the locum chambers

[http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/main-content/-/article_display_list/10930157/why-i-set-up-a-chambers-for-locums](http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/main-content/-/article_display_list/10930157/why-i-set-up-a-chambers-for-locums)

Document produced by NASGP re Freelance GP Support Groups

Information on Sessional GP Support Groups

http://www.nasgp.org.uk/SGPst/

list of groups and chambers

http://www.nasgp.org.uk/sgpgs/index.htm

**Financial Planning**

It goes without saying that you are well advised to speak with an independent financial adviser and accountant as well as tax advisor before starting out as a sessional doctor or GP locum, there are pension considerations as well as tax planning to be done; do you work as an individual and have NHS pension contributions or work as a company with the tax advantages that may give you?

(NHS locum work done by an individual (not by a private company) is pensionable in the NHS scheme, the health administration body responsible for primary care services provision will effectively make an ‘employers contribution’ on your behalf, as long as you get the relevant form completed, you make your own contribution separately.)

**Income Goal Setting**

If you start with doing a budget, work out what is the amount of income after tax that you wish to or need to earn each month, then you can work out how many sessions on average you will want or need to work, if you know what your hourly rate will or should be. Your accountant will calculate the likely proportion that will go as tax, after allowing for expenses so time spent with an accountant initially, even if the time is paid at a premium will pay for itself over and over, and you will work with greater confidence knowing where you are in comparison to your projections.
The Five ESSENTIAL Pillars For Building a Successful Sustainable Career As a Sessional GP or Locum Doctor

✓ 1 MINDSET FOR SUCCESS
✓ 2 CREATING YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER AVATAR
✓ 3 MARKETING YOURSELF – GETTING FOUND AND KNOWN
✓ 4 PLANNING AND PREPARATION BEFORE EACH NEW ASSIGNMENT
✓ 5 FEEDBACK AND REFERENCES
1 MINDSET FOR SUCCESS

Are you confident? Do you worry about getting enough and regular work as a locum? Do you have an ‘abundance’ philosophy or a ‘scarcity’ view on work opportunities? How are your levels of self-belief and self-worth?

You are a highly trained specialist health professional, you are a valuable asset to the NHS and practices will want what you have to offer. There is a never ending demand for locum / sessional medical work in the UK, YOU are in demand. But you have to know this and believe it applies to you personally.

There is a saying that learning about others is wisdom, whereas learning about yourself is enlightenment. Observation is powerful.

The state of your mind and your ability to control it and your thoughts is paramount to your likelihood of feeling successful and happy in what you achieve. There is not the space here to explore this further but there will be resources on my site http://DrSimonWade.com that cover this in more detail.
I would recommend to read if you are motivated, a short twenty eight page book “As a Man Thinketh, So Is He” by James Allen. He was an Englishman, who lived in Leicester, then retired to Ilfracombe, UK, and the book was written over a hundred years ago and is today available freely online as a public document. Another version of the title would be ‘what you think about, you become’ and its reflections and observations have become one of the cornerstones of the industry dedicated to personal development and self-improvement.

The state education system often seems to teach us to not stand out, but that learned habit will not help you if you want to be a successful locum doctor. You want to stand out, be out-standing in your work and in how you present yourself to others. The easiest way for people to see your unique gifts and talents is to be yourself, it’s much easier to maintain, much less effort than trying to be ‘someone else’.
Much of what we do in our work is guided by processes and procedures, clinical guidelines and the like, but there’s still room for your personality to shine through. Let the real you shine through, you are unique, patients and colleagues warm to personalities. And remember it’s alright if some don’t find you appealing, others will. Remember the saying ‘those that mind don’t matter, and those that matter, don’t mind’.

So you do not have to try to be liked by everyone, that’s very tiring and impossible to achieve, and actually a waste of your energy. Be the best ‘YOU’ that you can be, if you aim to help people to the best of your abilities, you will find success. And that means the practice manager will be calling you first, before anyone else, when next they need help.

At one time sessional or GP locum doctor work had some rather negative unspoken associations in the minds of some colleagues, but that is giving way to the realisation that more and more highly qualified and dedicated doctors choose to work this way. You are a highly valuable asset to the NHS, you can claim your own positive status as a sessional doctor / locum GP with pride.
CREATING YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER AVATAR

Its time very well spent if you can visualise the type of practice you wish to work in as a GP locum. The mental effort is worth the small time investment. Try to work out what is your ideal practice, also try to crystalize what type of practice you are not prepared to work in.

And remember the practice is your customer, they will be paying you (or the agency) for your services. If you are not using an agency then you are effectively marketing yourself to a practice, you have something they may want or need. You don’t want to be working somewhere you feel uncomfortable or not enjoy as resentment or frustration is very unhealthy, and can easily develop if you find yourself working in very different circumstances to those you would choose ‘in an ideal scenario’.

It’s one of the most important aspects of building your business. Who are you going to serve? Who are you going to share your services with.

This exercise can help you target your efforts at finding appropriate work that you will enjoy and find rewarding. So for example what size of practice would you prefer to work in, training practice or non-training, rural or urban, or suburban, visiting included or not, on-duty commitments or not, telephone triage included or not, set number of appointments per session or more flexible and open, does the computer operating system matter to you eg EMIS or System One, or one of the others.

Does the practice’s local reputation matter to you, do they regularly use locum / sessional doctors or not, are they organised for locums (do they have a ‘locum information / resources pack’). Do you want to use the locum attachment to learn about a particular geographical area so you can explore possibilities for settling down there.

Once you have spent a little time say twenty or thirty minutes thinking this through and writing down the important features, what you would wish for, what you would tolerate, what you would not tolerate, you will
have a much clearer picture of what sort of practice you will like to work for. This is very empowering, good stuff, worth doing.
3 MARKETING YOURSELF – GETTING FOUND AND KNOWN

Locum Agency Work

So if you wish to use a locum agency you would contact them by phone, probably initially, they will send you by email documents to complete and return together with the usual professional documents you will need to send them to prove who you are, where you live, your professional qualifications and GMC registration, performers list status, professional indemnity etc.

So there’s not really any marketing to be done. Once you are properly ‘signed up’ you will be made aware of various offers of work, and if you have done the exercise in 2 (creating your ideal customer avatar) you will be much better placed to ask the agency the appropriate questions BEFORE agreeing to any particular assignment. Being discerning in your choices of work offered will enhance your chances of enjoying your working experience. If you respond to agencies in a timely manner, and appear willing and able, you are likely to get more offers.

Being An Independent Locum – not working through an agency

You have an appetite for work, you know there is a demand for GP locums / sessional doctors but you need to get some work booked, so you need to find where the work is and present yourself in the best light, while not deceiving anyone. So this will effectively mean some type of marketing, ie you making the relevant practice aware of what you can offer, how you can solve their problem (needing a doctor resource) and on what terms.

You may find out about work by checking locally (post graduate centre noticeboards, local NHS intranet sites, directly contacting practice managers by phone or email or in person, or networking with colleagues and ‘keeping your ear to the ground’) . Otherwise national advertising sources may provide opportunities – BMJ, GP Magazine, Pulse etc.

Wherever you look for work you have to let the practice know about you. The traditional way would be a paper copy of your C.V. and a covering letter, before or after a telephone call or e-mail to a practice manager.
More and more communication is done electronically so a C.V can be e-mailed as a pdf document. You will need to be prepared to travel for a ‘no obligation’ interview, at your own expense.

Using email is a good first option, especially if your self confidence at this time is not great, it’s a less threatening first step and makes it easier then to follow up with a phone call later the next day or so. Its also very useful for keeping in touch if a contract of work is agreed sometime in advance, also very handy for getting in touch again with a practice manager where there may have been a gap of time since you last worked there.

Never ever fax your C.V and covering letter, unless you have no option as its outdated technology, and doesn’t reflect well on you, who want to present yourself as up to date and current, in all matters.

Even better is also to have an up to date online profile available on a site for professionals such as ‘Linkedin’ that can be viewed; you can have recommendations and testimonials on your profile as well as a picture so this can be very useful. (Its free to set up your own profile, but important to set it up properly and completely so it shows you off to the professional world in the best possible manner.)

The very best option now is to actually have your own website, so your profile is on your own site, with a professional photo, an ‘about me’ page as well as the means of contact etc. You are controlling more people’s first impression of you when they find you.

Creating your own personal website is relatively easy with free software applications such as ‘Wordpress’ (http://www.wordpress.org ) and it does not have to be complicated or expensive these days to have a professional looking website with your profile, so when people search online for you (which they will) they will find you.
Side Note: remember if you don’t exert some influence over what people will find when they search for you online, you are at the mercy of snippets of comments you may have placed on blogs or forums, and remember your facebook page will easily be accessible so you need to consider if there is anything there that you would rather wasn’t viewed by a prospective customer/practice manager/GP partner.

Your website is your online ‘brand’ it shows you are ‘there’ and a good website can make quite a difference to your getting offers after people get to know a bit about you from your site.

If this appeals you can click the link at the foot of the pages on my website [http://DrSimonWade.com](http://DrSimonWade.com) and get a very reasonable package to get this done with and for you.

Having some video of yourself talking on the website can be very beneficial, especially as it shows you are human, lets some of your personality come across and helps the process of people who don’t yet know you to begin the process of knowing you so they can hopefully begin to like and trust you- this has to happen before you will be given work, and will make any face to face interviews seem easier and less important in ‘clinching the work’.

Again, the technology for putting up some video on eg a wordpress site is such that its very simple and straightforward, when you know how, and YouTube has many free learning videos showing you how to do this if you are not sure.
The Interview

There is not space to cover this in great detail here, (there will be more resources on my website) suffice to say the interview at a practice for a potential locum contract is another aspect of you marketing yourself. The important minimum requirements from your point of view are as follows:

- to be clear in advance the date, time and location of the interview and ensure you arrive early, must not be late.

- plan your journey and add extra allotted journey time to compensate for any unexpected travel delays such as accident or traffic – if the worst happens, telephone the surgery, they should understand if there is a legitimate reason for a delayed arrival.

- try to arrive early so you can have 10-15 minutes sitting in the waiting room gathering your thoughts, making sure you look presentable, and it also allows you to get a feel for the place.

- Remember first impressions count (face to face as well as online) so have a smile, a natural one, when you meet and greet any staff.

- Have original and paper copies of your professional documents to hand, as well as a copy of your C.V. and covering letter.

- During the interview try to have at least two pertinent questions you can ask the manager / partner.

- Ask what their experience of GP locums is and whether they use an agency etc

- Ensure you are clear what the practice expect you to do in the assignment, what rate they will agree to pay and what you are happy to do / not do and clarify any elements of flexibility that they may wish to ‘write in’ to your agreement. Better to know at this stage rather than have issues that have to be talked through again later.

- You want to try to appear professional, friendly, relaxed and flexible within reason when negotiating. Rigidity is not endearing.
➢ Check that at the end of the meeting both parties are clear on what it is exactly that you have agreed to. Also clarify the next steps, whether they will be in touch with you or seek to get references, know what happens next.

After the interview expect some communication from the practice to confirm arrangements, their wish to have you work with them should have been made clear at the interview, unless multiple ‘candidates’ are being assessed. If after several days you have not heard anything, it’s acceptable to contact the practice manager by email or telephone.
4 PLANNING AND PREPARATION BEFORE EACH NEW ASSIGNMENT

So you have a booked **locum** assignment, that’s great and what you want is an enjoyable, productive work experience for you and your clients, hopefully so they will look on you favourably when some more **locum GP** work comes along later at that same practice. The easiest way to get more locum assignments going forward, is from clients you have served already who know and like you and are happy with your work.

With this in mind you will improve the chances of a happy outcome with some planning and preparation in advance of the start date.

(It goes without saying that it is wise to keep a central diary of all booked work that you can refer to before agreeing any **GP locum** work so you don’t get ‘double booked’ or clash with family holiday arrangements etc, on a Sunday evening its worth spending 5-10 minutes looking at the diary just to help focus your mind on where you are going to be for the next days and weeks)

The following are provided as a helpful but not exhaustive list of considerations:

• What work exactly have you agreed to do – this should have been clarified at a meeting or by phone and confirmed in an email or letter. If you are not sure, contact the manager as soon as possible to get clarification. Are you ‘just’ seeing patients, are you also looking at
pathology results, doing prescription signing, taking a share of telephone triage or telephone ‘queries’ at some point? Visits?

- Also decide if you will be flexible if asked to do a little bit more at the end, the remuneration for such extra work ‘pro rata’ should be agreed in advance; managers like it if you can show some flexibility.

- Ensure you have agreed to appointments booked at a rate you are comfortable with, when it’s a completely new surgery you should start at a slower rate of consulting; ensure gaps are built in and time allotted for admin. A common arrangement seems to be 5 patients per hour with 10 minutes for admin; you can request gaps that work for you and the practice will usually accommodate as long as you see the agreed number of booked appointments.

- Check your professional indemnity is up to date and will not expire before you start the assignment, also that you have all your relevant professional papers including a letter from PCT or whatever body has replaced it, stating you are on the performers list, also a letter from the GMC confirming your ‘licence to practice’ is current and active (the manage can and should check this routinely with the GMC)

- Do you have a reliable and simple solution for invoicing – important both for claiming what you have rightly earned but also vital for your accountant. There are several free software solutions available; I find ‘Express Invoice’ very good and a great time saver aswell as helping me stay organised; here’s the link www.nchsoftware.com/invoice/index.html

- Check the route and estimated journey time, and variations you can use to get to work if there is a jam or accident or other problem on your ‘first choice’ route, You can check the timing of route variations as calculated on the route planner page of the AA website http://www.theAA.com. Now you can be clear what time you need to depart on your journey so as not to be late; I add 15 minutes to the expected journey time, as well as planning to arrive 15 minutes before the planned clinic start time, if it’s a smooth run, the extra time can be used to settle in and get a cup of tea etc before you
Do you know which computer system is being used, are you familiar with it or do you need to book an induction session (you should assume it will be in your own time, unpaid - if not, that’s a bonus). I have at times in the past attended the day before if it’s a local practice and spent a prearranged 1-2 hours familiarising myself with a ‘new’ system. This is a very worthwhile personal investment and reduces greatly the stresses of your first few sessions on said system that are likely if this is not done.

Will the practice provide examination equipment, apart from stethoscope, or will you need your full ‘doctors bag’ with auroscope, peak flow meter, blood oxygen saturation monitor, sphygmomanometer, digital thermometer etc etc. If in doubt check with the practice.

Ensure all your own medical equipment is in good working order and take it with you ‘just in case’ it’s required after all.

Does the practice have a ‘locum induction / information pack’, does it have all the usually required telephone numbers if an acute admission or referral is needed? Does it state what the referral process is for routine referrals, how much of it are you expected to do, and how much the secretary?
• Find out as much as you can about the practice eg check their website, try locate all the names of the doctors, is the practice catering to a particular patient demographic, remember the practice manager’s name – we all know how we feel better when someone addresses us personally.

• Decide whether you will make the effort to seek out and meet the doctors, show your face, shake hands and build some rapport, it will usually be very worthwhile as well as smoothing your work experience.

• Remind yourself before and once there, that it’s perfectly alright to seek assistance with any aspect of the work that you are not confident about, small concerns or problems can be dealt with easily if caught early rather than being allowed to grow. The manager will see this as a sign of strength of character if you are comfortable asking for clarity or guidance / help on some matter early on.

• Will you take your own lunch etc or ‘take a chance on finding somewhere to ‘grab a snack’ you will work much better when fuelled appropriately! Also when you first arrive ensure you find out where the coffee / tea / lounge facility is and whether you ‘make your own’ or as has been my experience occasionally drinks are made for you at a set time or on request – very civilised!

• Try to remember at some point to make a written assessment for your own records after the assignment so you will more readily be able to accept or decline future offers of work depending on your previous experience, and bookings.
This section is last but by no means least important of the five pillars which will help you construct your successful locum GP / sessional doctor career. A lot of locum colleagues don’t routinely ask for feedback, but without it how will you really gauge how you have done?

It’s especially important for longer locum bookings, after 1-2 weeks I always ask the manager and doctor colleagues for feedback. It helps with self confidence, and projects confidence, showing you are not afraid to ask, and also shows you care about your work and performance.

Also if you are doing a good job which is appreciated, why not ask for a testimonial, you can use on your C.V., linkedin profile or personal website.

Testimonials are very powerful and can help greatly in positioning you as the local ‘go to’ doctor for locum or sessional work.
Also after a longer attachment, say greater than a month, you should ask if you can name the manager or partner you have come to know, for a reference. These are vital for sustaining a locum career, and will likely need updating more frequently than you had previously imagined. Should a reference only be from the last practice you worked at? There’s a thought to mull over, and debate with colleagues.

Revalidation

This report is not the place to go into revalidation but obviously this area of your career should only be neglected if you plan on retiring sometime very soon. So recording where you have worked, keeping feedback, any audits you have been involved in, patient feedback surveys if you are based in a sole practice for any length of time, these are all very useful aswell as the need to show ongoing and continued reflective learning. There will be more on this on my website http://DrSimonWade.com.
Challenge

We have no other competition in life except ourselves. We grow by pushing ourselves, or being stretched a little at a time out of our comfort zone. And then as we settle in to a new higher level we become more comfortable, until we stretch ourselves and grow some more.

I would like to extend a friendly challenge to anyone currently thinking of joining an agency or already signed up to an agency to take a step towards a more prosperous, profitable and enjoyable future. Take that first possibly uncomfortable step by taking the helm of the ship that is your medical career, take control and set your course to new exciting waters, free of the anchors that a locum agency drops behind you. It can be highly rewarding and very satisfying, you can flourish and be the best YOU that you can be, have a great career.

Through your exposure to a multitude of practice locations, styles and demographics you will blossom and grow as a locum GP / sessional doctor and I hope this short guide has been useful and that you may have gleaned a few nuggets of useful information. Even just one useful tip for you will have made the effort in creating this report worthwhile.

I would encourage you to visit my site for the blog and other useful resources that will be added at various times. Also please look out for emails from my-self, do add me to your contacts list so you can ensure you will receive them.

And please do leave a comment on my website........

http://DrSimonWade.com/comments
Please feel free to share this report with any colleague you feel may benefit, and do encourage them to visit my site for more useful information and resources. I want as many people as possible to read this.

To your success health and happiness

Dr Simon Wade

http://DrSimonWade.com