

Locum highs and lows

Felisa Saverias has learnt that the 'locum glass' may be half full or half empty



Most practices need locum cover during assistants' holiday/maternity/sabbatical periods. We recently had a period of cover by locums from the southern hemisphere. It made me wonder why so many locums are foreign. The majority qualified in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa as their qualifications are recognised in the UK.

Is locuming not an attractive deal for British grads? Having never locumed myself, I put feelers out to the veterans of this trade. The feedback I received was full of pros and cons.

Starting with the glass half full:

- ☺ Locum rates are attractive.
- ☺ The commitment is minimal.
- ☺ Job dates can be flexible and under your control.
- ☺ Limitless holidays with an attractive salary to sustain them.
- ☺ A chance to experience and understand how different practices are run without having to make a long commitment.
- ☺ Learning the tricks of the trade from country and town vets.
- ☺ Farm/equine practice one week, small furies/exotics the next.
- ☺ Developing people skills by virtue of having to meet and work with a different staff and clientele every few weeks.
- ☺ Getting to visit, live and appreciate different parts of the UK, thus enabling an informed decision on where is suitable for you.

The impression I got was that locuming is perfect a few years postgraduation for making good money to pay off student loans, as well as for holidays, and for getting a feel for practice

once you are confident about your own abilities and want to develop yourself further.

It was repeatedly stressed to me by locum veterans that locuming is ideal for someone who is versatile, dynamic and independent.

However, the locum glass may also be half empty:

- ☹ Locum accommodation can be dire and depressingly sparse.
- ☹ There may not always be a steady stream of jobs when you require them.
- ☹ Travelling constantly and living out of a few suitcases is restrictive.
- ☹ Locum jobs are not always what you bargained for and support from the practice should not be expected.
- ☹ It can be tiring constantly making transitional friendships that inevitably fizzle out when you move on.
- ☹ The uncertainty of arriving at each new job causes stress and anxiety.
- ☹ It can be demoralising when clients don't want to see an unfamiliar locum.
- ☹ It is perpetual pot luck!

Now three years' qualified, I have had stability and support, especially in my present job. I feel competent and settled but am keen for a new challenge. A certificate is not my bag so I have considered locuming very seriously.

It would give me the opportunity to pay off loans, and to save for my future as well as to visit faraway shores. I have promised myself a six-month trial. I don't expect I am nomadic enough to cope with it for longer than that, but watch this space. Those from the southern hemisphere tell me that the freedom is addictive.