

Rural Physician Recruitment and Staffing Survey Results

| Strategies for Recruiting Physicians to Work in Rural Healthcare



A new survey from Jackson Physician Search and LocumTenens.com – both part of the Jackson Healthcare® family of companies – shows hope for rural healthcare organizations to make progress in resolving their physician staffing challenges.

We surveyed physicians currently working in urban, suburban and rural settings to better understand their specific needs and wants in regard to choosing to practice in a rural location. When those in urban and suburban locations were asked what factors might influence their choice to practice in a rural location, only 10% said they would not consider a rural location at all. The reality that 90% would consider rural practice if the conditions are well-aligned is welcomed news. Interestingly, 72% of urban and suburban physicians reported they would be open to considering 'trying out' rural medicine via a locum tenens assignment. Not only does this strategy fill gaps in coverage in the short run, but it could present another path towards permanent recruitment. And, given that nearly half of rural primary care practices employ at least one nurse practitioner, we asked advanced practice providers what would motivate them to relocate to a rural location.

We also surveyed administrators to learn where there is and is not alignment with physicians. The key for administrators is to better address the specific needs and wants of physicians, which this report makes clear are often influenced by current practice location and generation.

This report includes:

- *Physicians' sentiments on what they want in a permanent rural opportunity*
- *Physicians' views on rural locum tenens and recommendations for its strategic use*
- *A snapshot of how COVID is impacting physician retirements and rural recruitment*
- *Tips to more efficiently and effectively recruit physicians to rural healthcare by addressing key generational differences when marketing job opportunities*

State of Rural Healthcare in America

The U.S. continues to face a severe physician shortage, and unfortunately, the impact of this is often multiplied in rural communities. Around the country, [“healthcare deserts”](#) exist, meaning that people who live in rural locations – a disproportionate number of whom live under the [poverty level](#) and in [poorer health](#) – often must travel long distances to seek anything from routine care to treatment for chronic conditions.

According to the [National Conference of State Legislators](#), “Approximately one-fifth of the nation’s population lives in a rural area, but only about 10 percent of the nation’s physicians are located there. This is considered to be one reason rural Americans have higher rates of death, disability and chronic disease than their urban counterparts.” And, of the 7,200 federally designated health professional shortage areas, the [Association of American Medical Colleges \(AAMC\)](#) reports that 60% are in rural areas. A few trends are converging that increase the challenge of recruiting physicians for rural healthcare positions and retaining those already there:

- Physician retirements are imminent, with [40% of active physicians](#) across the nation reaching age 65 within the next decade. Compounding this anticipated exit is the reality that the percentage is even higher in rural areas.
- The ‘Great Resignation’ is likely to hit rural areas hard. According to Jackson Physician Search’s own [research](#) in mid-2021, 43% of the physicians surveyed said they were considering early retirement and 46% said they were considering leaving for a new healthcare employer. This particular study addressed physicians working in all geographic areas, rural included.
- Rural-raised medical students have declined, even though overall medical school enrollment has increased. [A 2019 study](#) found that fewer than 5% of incoming medical school students came from rural areas in 2017. This is significant because we know that these are the ones most likely to practice in rural areas.

Every signal we’re receiving from both physicians and administrators tells us that it’s time to shake up the status quo in how rural healthcare organizations approach physician recruitment. If we’re going to realize the goal of creating better access to healthcare and improved health outcomes for rural Americans, then healthcare leaders need to reimagine how they source, recruit and retain physicians.

With that in mind, Jackson Physician Search and LocumTenens.com fielded this new research in October 2021, asking 1,311 physicians, 169 administrators, as well as 158 advanced practice providers, a series of questions to better understand the specific dynamics of working in rural, urban and suburban healthcare settings and what could be done to entice more providers to go rural. Of particular interest is sentiment broken down by the needs and desires of physicians by generation, and our recommendations for recruitment and retention that take these differences into account.

With a focus on learning what it would take to increase the success of physician recruiting and physician retention practices in rural settings, we asked questions such as:

- What would prompt you to work in a rural setting?
- Would you be open to a locum tenens assignment that would enable you to ‘try out’ practicing in a rural location?
- What are the top attributes of your organization’s culture that appeal to you?
- What factors would motivate you to stay at your current organization for at least five more years?

Additionally, COVID continues to influence the decisions physicians are making about their careers. Questions we asked included:

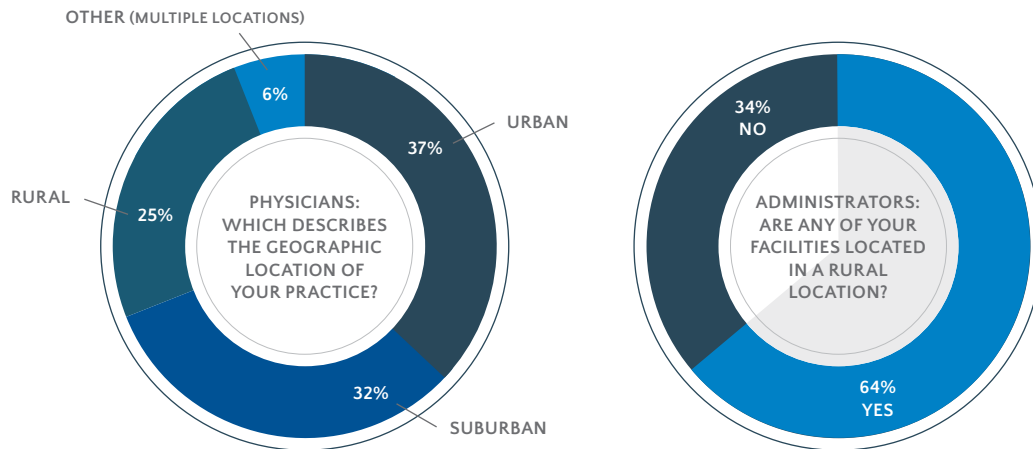
- Has the experience of working in healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated your plans for retirement?
- For those working in rural healthcare, was COVID-19 the reason you chose it?

Preview of the Survey Data

Of the 1,311 physicians who responded, **25%** indicated they are already practicing in rural areas.* In addition:

- **37%** indicated their area of practice as urban
- **32%** said they are practicing in suburban areas

A majority of administrators who responded, or **64%**, indicated they have facilities in rural areas.



* While only about 10% of the nation's physicians practice in rural areas, 25% of the survey respondents are currently in rural areas.

Characteristics of Physicians by Geographic Area

URBAN

- More likely to be a Millennial and to be retiring in 16 years or more
- More likely to work in university hospitals as compared to physicians in suburban or rural areas
- Places higher value on availability of leadership opportunities as a retention factor than other locations
- Higher compensation, bonuses, benefits and improved work/life balance rank as the top two factors that would prompt physicians to consider rural practice
- In term of cultural attributes, places higher value on leadership transparency, respectfulness and trustworthiness compared to physicians practicing in a rural location

SUBURBAN

- More likely to be part of Generation X
- More likely to work in an independent medical group/practice as compared to physicians in urban or rural areas
- Places higher value on the ability to use telehealth as a retention factor than other locations
- Higher compensation, bonuses, benefits and strong organizational culture rank as the top two factors that would prompt physicians to consider rural practice
- Just like the urban physicians, suburban physicians place higher value on the following cultural attributes as compared to rural physicians: leadership transparency, respectfulness and trustworthiness

RURAL

- More likely to be a Baby Boomer and to be retiring in 3-5 years
- More likely to work in an independent community hospital or critical access hospital as compared to physicians in urban or suburban areas
- Places higher value on retention bonuses as a retention factor than other locations
- Have rural ties: more likely to be raised in a rural community (36%) or have a spouse raised rurally (20%)
- In terms of cultural attributes, places higher value on family-friendly environment and community involvement compared to the other locations

Permanent Physician Recruitment

Physicians Practicing in Urban and Suburban Locations Look for More Compensation, Flexibility and Work/Life Balance When Considering Rural Opportunities

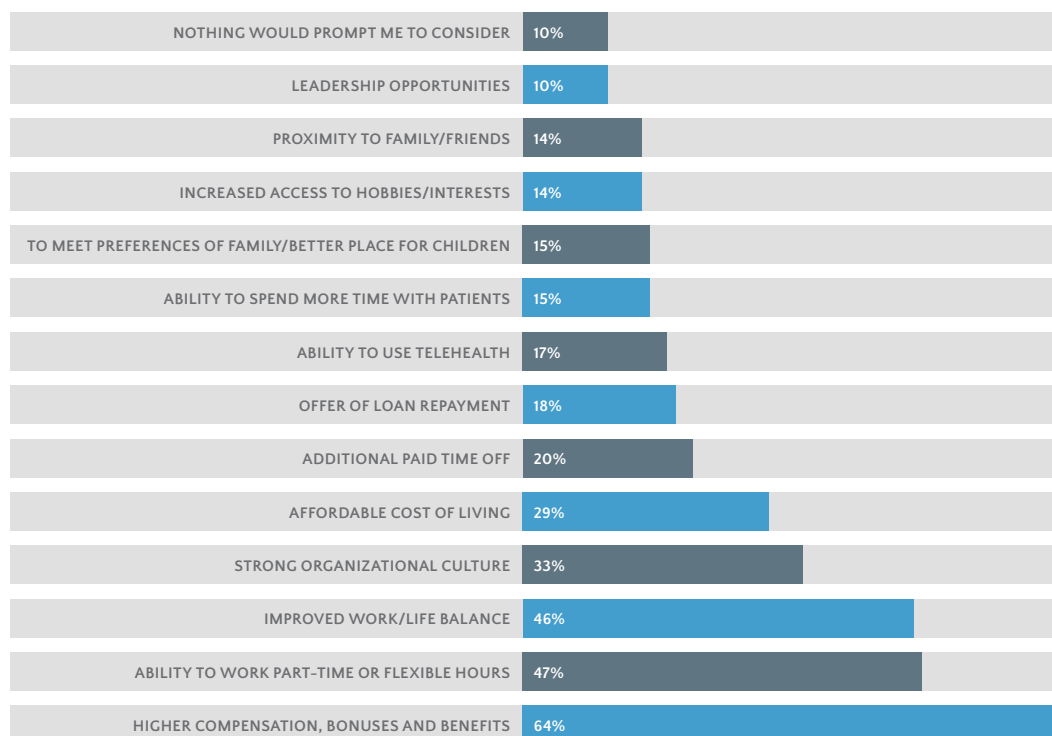
If only 10% of physicians practicing in urban and suburban locations said nothing would prompt them to consider accepting a rural position, then the remaining 90% are at a minimum open to practicing rural medicine. So, what is stopping them from doing so? It's an age-old question that begs for new answers.

To learn more, we asked physicians who are currently working in urban or suburban settings to be specific about what might persuade them to consider a position at a rural practice or hospital.

Not surprisingly, higher compensation, bonuses and benefits ranks at the top of their five most important factors with 64% saying as much. Nearly half could be persuaded by the ability to work part-time or flexible hours (47%) and to achieve better work/life balance (46%). A strong organizational culture (33%) and an affordable cost of living (29%) round out the top five.

Physicians practicing in an urban or suburban location:

Select the factors that would prompt you to consider practicing in a rural location.

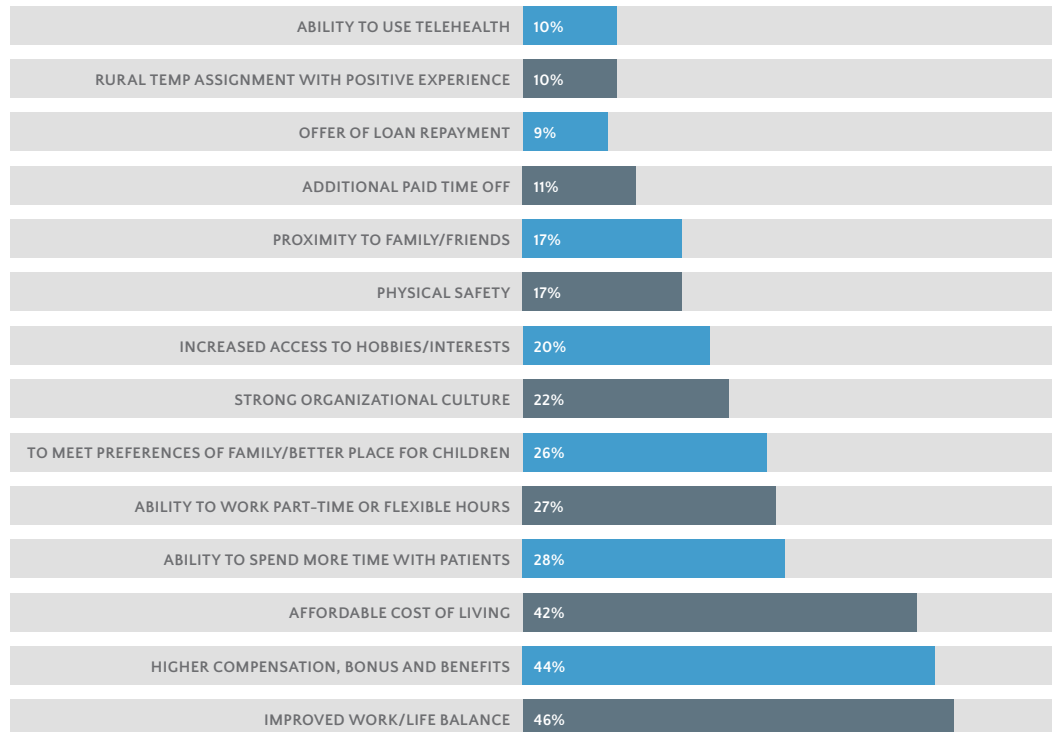


Physicians Already Practicing in Rural Locations Share a Different Perspective About Why They Chose Rural Medicine

The top factors that drew physicians to rural practice are work/life balance (46%), higher compensation (44%), an affordable cost of living (42%), more time with patients (28%), and schedule flexibility (27%). Close behind the top five was to meet family preferences with 26% of physicians reporting it.

Physicians practicing in a rural location:

Select the top five factors that contributed to your decision to practice in a rural location.



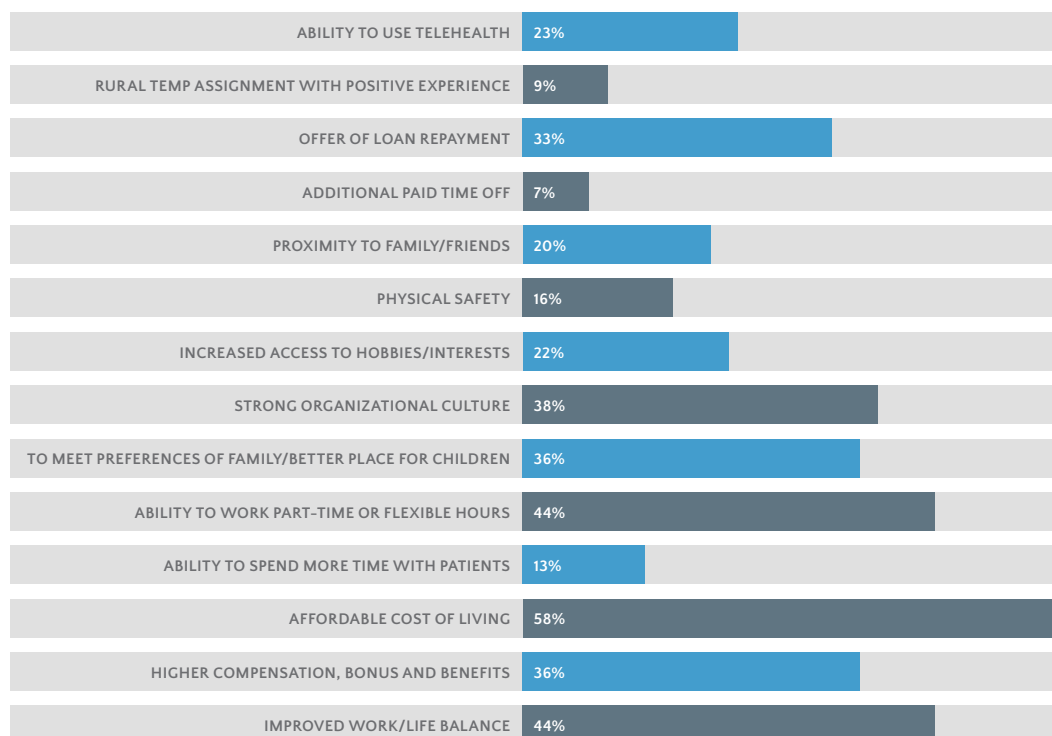
Administrators Diverge When Asked What Five Factors Physicians Consider When Deciding if Rural Healthcare is the Right Move

At the top of their list is affordable cost of living (58%), a factor that ranks fifth among urban and suburban physicians and third among rural physicians. Interestingly, higher compensation ranks fifth (36% and tied with meet family preferences), whereas physicians rank it first or second depending on current practice location. Other factors that administrators believe are important to physicians include:

- Improved work/life balance (44%)
- Flexible or part-time work (44%)
- Strong organizational culture (38%)
- Loan repayment (33%)

It is worth noting that the one area in which physicians and administrators appear to be most aligned is work/life balance. Considering the stress and demand of the pandemic during the last two years, it is certainly understandable that this factor is top-of-mind in the healthcare industry.

Administrators: Select the top five factors that you believe positively contributed to your physician staff's decision to practice in your rural facility.



Minimizing the Hard and Soft Costs of Physician Vacancies

The takeaway here is that the survey data indicates that urban/suburban physicians are suggesting that if they are well-paid, are allowed flexibility in their schedules, and are assured of better work/life balance, the rural location may be less of a problem for many physicians than the administrators believe. This is compelling because, when you consider the hard and soft costs of vacancies, it's possible that slightly increasing compensation is a financially sound way to go. Weighing the [cost of recruitment](#), estimated at \$250,000 per physician (recruiting, bonuses, relocation), and the "cost" of lost revenue of \$1M or more annually for some specialties suggest that higher compensation could bridge both the time and expense gap.

Survey respondent Jeff Turner is the CEO of Moore County Hospital District located in Dumas, Texas., a city of 15,000 people located 40 miles north of Amarillo, describes their approach to recruiting as starting with the culture of his organization. "We have 96% employee engagement," said Turner, explaining that his organization puts a premium on creating a positive physician experience. Everything you do with physicians, has to do with their experience. That doesn't happen by accident. It's very intentional."

From there, Turner acknowledges that compensation is critical. "We may be a small town, but this is a 'national' market," explains Turner. "I have to pay a competitive wage."



Physician Retention Begins at Recruitment: Understanding the Impact of Culture, Job-Specific Factors, and Professional and Personal Fulfillment

Administrators underestimate the importance of providing physician autonomy. Just 24% feel it's an attribute of culture that most appeals to physicians. However, physicians, regardless of practice location, rank it as the most important aspect of culture. On the other hand, administrators overestimate the value physicians place on teamwork (50%) and a patient-focused culture (51%). Physicians also value these elements of culture, just not as highly as administrators believe.

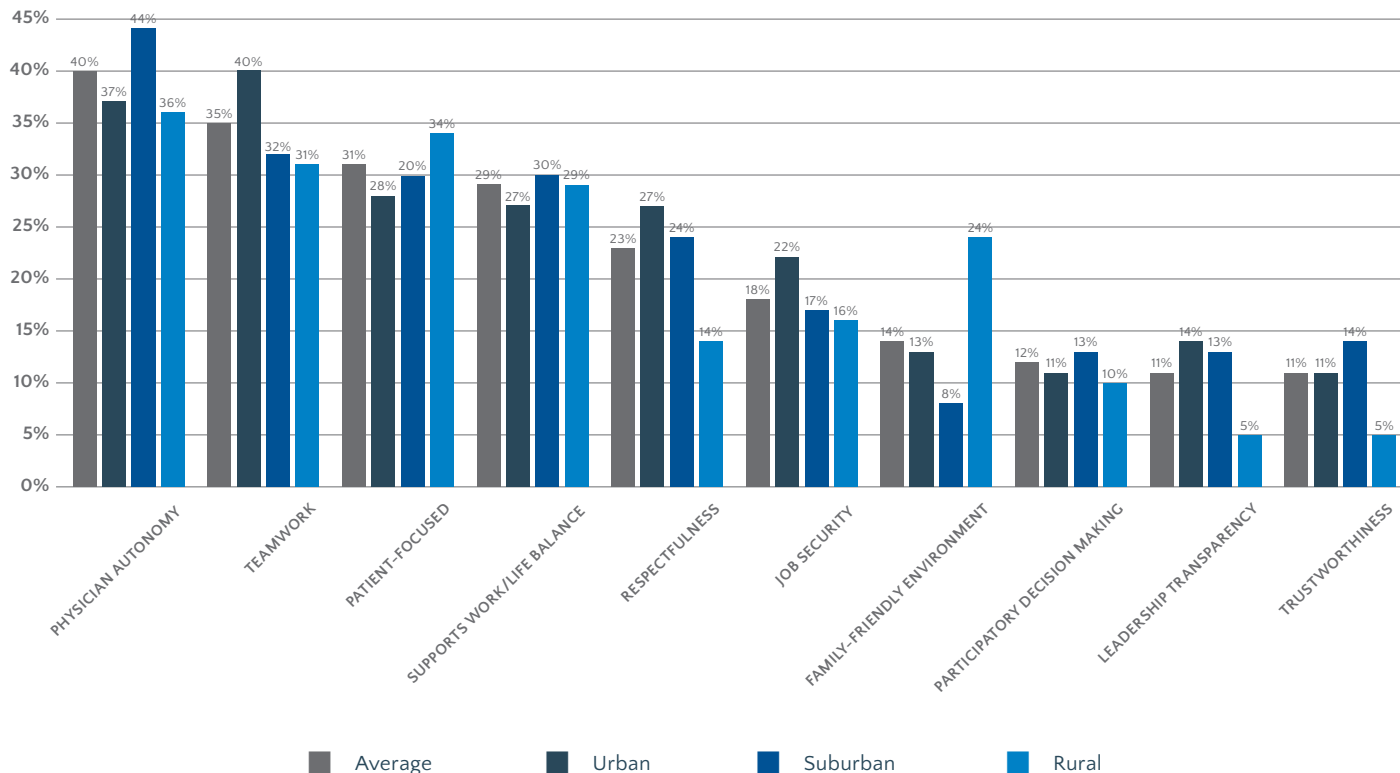
Interestingly, when you look at the sentiments of physicians working across all geographic areas side-by-side, a pattern begins to emerge about what's working for rural physicians better than it is for physicians in urban and suburban areas.

Rural physicians are slightly more satisfied by the patient-focused (34%) nature of their practice. They also express a stronger belief than their counterparts that they live and work in a family-friendly environment, while overall rural practitioners score their leadership transparency, trustworthiness and respectfulness lower than their counterparts. Since physicians more often assume a leadership or central role in rural facilities, it could be that these are aspects of culture in which they have more control.

The takeaway here underscores the idea that working on the softer side of the workplace – i.e., the culture of your organization – could create a situation that is more conducive to attracting and retaining physicians.

Physicians:

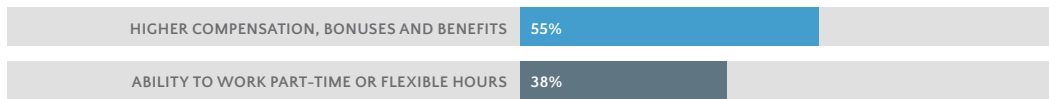
What are the top three attributes of your organization's culture that appeal to you as a physician?



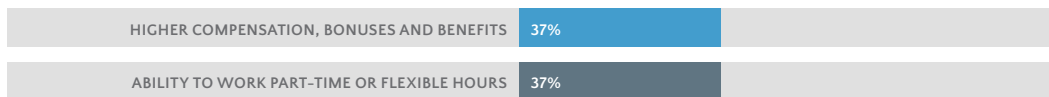
What Will Motivate Physicians to Stay?

While physicians and administrators agree on the top two factors most likely to influence physician retention, physicians place significantly greater value on higher compensation, bonuses and benefits.

Physicians: What are the top two factors that would motivate you to stay at your current organization for the next five years or more?



Administrators: What are the top two factors that would motivate your physicians to stay at your current organization for the next five years or more?



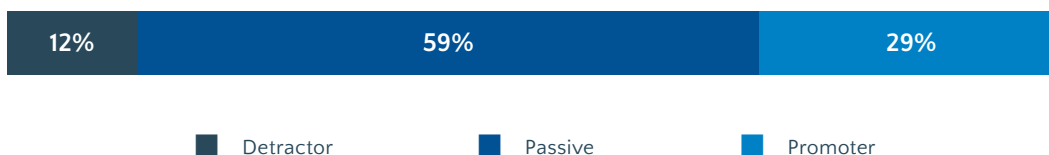
How Professionally and Personally Fulfilled are Physicians?

Another area of disconnect is on the topic of professional fulfillment. Fulfillment means different things to different people, and we asked both physicians and administrators to gauge their fulfillment as Promoters (enthusiastically happy), Passive (happy but not as enthusiastic as Promoters), or Detractors (unhappy, negative experience). As interesting as the responses is also the disconnect – administrators (29%) perceive that physicians (19%) are more professionally fulfilled than they actually are. Also, 36% of physicians say they are unfulfilled but only 12% of administrators recognize it.

Physicians: Based on what your organization and your community provide to you and your family, how do you describe your level of fulfillment on a **professional** level?

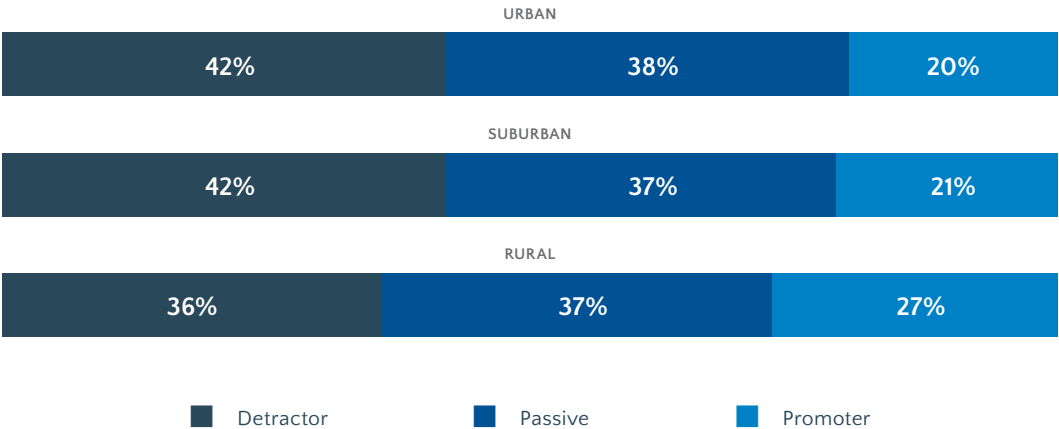


Administrators: Based on what your organization and the community provide to your physicians and their families, how do you believe that most of them would describe their level of fulfillment on a **professional** level?



Physicians: Based on what your organization and your community provide to you and your family, how do you describe your level of fulfillment on a **personal** level?

Considering the data thus far, it’s perhaps not a surprise that among all geographic locations – urban, suburban and rural – rural physicians reported slightly higher levels of personal fulfillment (27% vs. 20% for urban and 21% for suburban), while administrators overestimate physicians’ feelings (33%). Effectively communicating to these physicians that a more fulfilling career might be just outside the borders of the city feels like a sentiment that is promising for the future of rural healthcare.



“The people I try to recruit are not focused purely on money. I’m looking for community people, family people, who are interested in quality medicine with a broad perspective on what quality of life means to them,” says Turner. “And I find when you do find that well-rounded person, they are very happy. They find value in a work environment like this and are more fulfilled.”

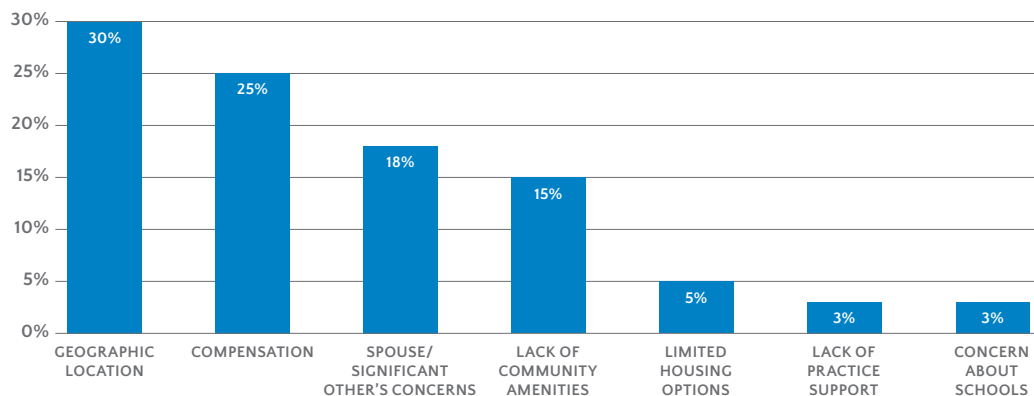


Why Do Physicians Decline Rural Healthcare Job Offers?

According to surveyed rural administrators, they cite that the most common reason a physician has declined to work in a rural area is the location itself (30%), followed by compensation (25%) and concerns that a spouse or significant other may have about a rural lifestyle (18%). Amenities like housing, community and schools are not on the administrators' radar as issues, nor is a concern about lack of practice support.

Administrators located in a rural location:

When a physician candidate declines an offer in a rural location, what is the one most common reason?



"The biggest challenge we have is getting recruits to visit a rural setting," said Robbie Dewberry, CEO of Mitchell County Hospital in Colorado City, Texas. "Explaining our small-town quality of life to potential recruits is key. We are always honest and transparent about the positives and the negatives of living in a rural community. We also offer competitive pay and sign-on bonuses, and consider a quality lifestyle, an affordable cost-of-living, and a newer critical access hospital facility to be a draw. We also don't hide the fact that we are 100 miles from the metropolitan theatres and art district."

Turner agrees and says his recruiting philosophy at Moore County focuses squarely on fit for small town life, including how a physician's lifestyle and family circumstances might align. "Once you find the right person, it's easy." He says, "The ideal candidate for you may have a spouse who shares their interest in giving life in a rural community a try. If there is a lack of alignment between what the two want in terms of lifestyle, you may not have a match long-term."

It is worth noting that while location can be a challenge to overcome, physicians in urban and suburban areas point to compensation as the most important factor when considering a move. The [on-site interview and community tour](#) is key to highlighting the many lifestyle benefits of a rural location.

"I'll never forget my first rural placement as a young recruiter," said Jackson Physician Search President Tony Stajduhar. "Hermiston, Oregon is a pretty small town with a population around 20,000, and I was brought in by a hospital to recruit a general surgeon. Shortly after the site visit, I found a recently trained surgeon who was raised and trained in Illinois. He and his wife wanted to stay close to home. But when I described how their needs aligned perfectly with this location, he knew it was worth serious consideration. It wasn't long after that he accepted the position, and 36 years later, he's still there."

Locums Tenens or Temporary Physician Staffing

Strategically Leverage Physicians' Interest in Locum Tenens to Fill Gaps and to Network

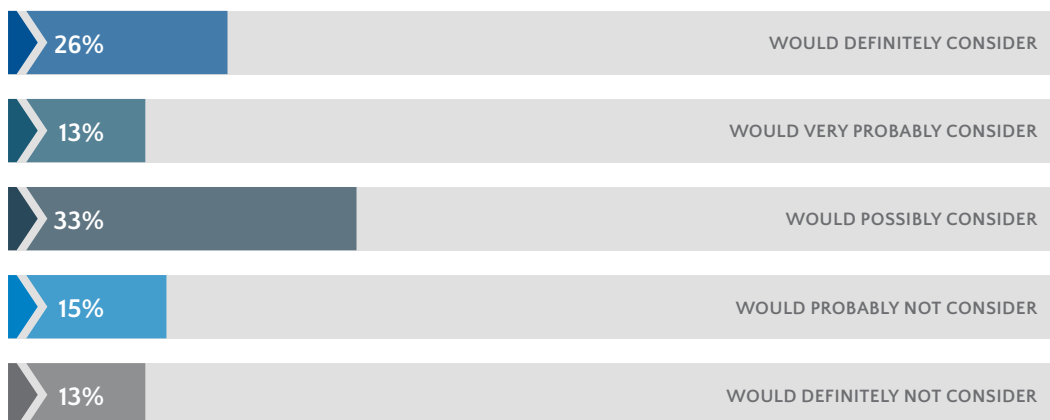
Traditionally, locum tenens work has been thought of by physicians as a way to fill gaps between full-time employment or as a way to ease into retirement, but there are so many other reasons why the locum tenens model of employment is appealing, especially to residents. From trying out different types of practices and locations before settling down, to making extra money to pay down debt, more physicians are choosing to [pursue locum tenens work post-residency](#). And, some physicians are choosing to make locum tenens work their [full-time career](#).

Perspectives Contributing to Physician Interest in Working a Rural Locum Tenens Assignment

We asked physicians that don't already work in a rural setting how likely they might be to consider a locum tenens assignment to 'try out' a rural location. 72% of physicians responded favorably to the idea. Interestingly, those who responded that they would definitely, very probably or possibly consider this are more likely Baby Boomers (34%), male (56%), and planning to work for another 3-10 years before retiring (38%). Those same physicians were also more likely to be motivated by higher compensation, bonuses and benefits (46%) and the ability to work part-time or to work flexible hours (22%).

Physicians practicing in an urban or suburban location:

Would you be open to a locum tenens assignment that would enable you to 'try out' practicing in a rural location?



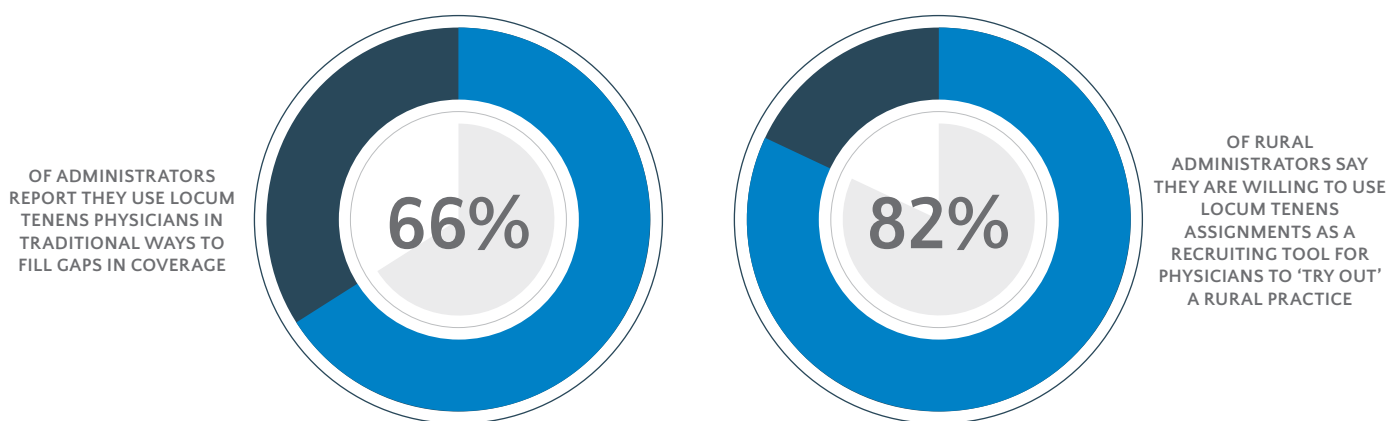
"For many physicians, those just starting out or those on the cusp of retirement, it's appealing to know that temporary positions are available in every state across the country," said Chris Franklin, president of LocumTenens.com. "The idea that travel and housing expenses are covered, and that they will receive help with credentialing and obtaining their license, and that their malpractice insurance is also covered lowers the barrier for a candidate who might be willing to use a temporary assignment to 'try out' a rural placement."

“Of course, that scenario can sound expensive to some in the recruiting role,” Franklin acknowledges. “But it is all about perspective. If a vacancy is costing you in terms of lost revenue and the risk of increased burnout on your existing staff, you need to consider the impact of that cost over time. Locum tenens can deliver help where it is needed most, as quickly as possible, which sometimes means little to no interruption in patient care.”

Steve Jacobs, a physician recruiter for Einstein Healthcare Network in Philadelphia, Pa., underscores the perspective that your recruiting approach will benefit from thinking outside the traditional recruiting box, regardless of the geography you might be recruiting for: “Physician recruiting challenges you to use all your skills, and in order to be successful, you’ll have to get creative. Build an arsenal of tools you can utilize when you need unique solutions. Working with locum tenens agencies is part of my arsenal. Patients can become frustrated when their provider leaves, whether it’s just for a short while or for an extended period of time, so it’s always important to ensure you’re prepared with someone new in place who is able to provide high-quality services and is a good fit for the job. Locum tenens recruiters can help you make that happen while ensuring patient satisfaction.”

Administrators Use Locum Tenens as a Stop-Gap and Would Consider It as a Recruiting Tool

While 66% of administrators report they use locum tenens physicians in traditional ways to fill gaps in coverage, 82% of rural administrators say they are willing to use locum tenens assignments as a recruiting tool for physicians to ‘try out’ a rural practice.



Physicians and administrators find agreement in the idea that a temporary assignment in a rural location that leads to a positive experience has the potential to become a permanent solution. Nine percent of administrators and 10% of rural physicians cite this as a factor that contributed to a permanent rural practice decision. It’s a small number to be sure, but it’s worth noting that both sides of the situation have experienced positive outcomes, making it a strategy worth considering. The data suggests there may be untapped potential for healthcare administrators to deploy locum tenens ‘try-outs’ as a recruitment strategy.

The key is to initiate open discussions with rural locum tenens providers. Would they consider a permanent role? What are their most important must-haves? Do they have family and friends nearby? Learn as much as you can.

When you find a physician who appears to be a strong fit with your culture and is open to pursuing a permanent role at some point in the near future, you may have a promising candidate. Making them feel welcomed is an important first step to building a lasting relationship. At a minimum, introduce these physicians to the CEO and to other key providers on staff, so they can begin to envision being part of your team.

The takeaway is that permanent opportunities are more abundant than temporary ones because a locum tenens placement looks more expensive from a short-term perspective. However, when you factor in the cost and extended timeline associated with recruiting for permanent positions, which can take an average of 6-12+ months for certain specialties, locum tenens clinicians generate revenue that would be left uncollected should the position remain open during that period of time, making it an attractive short-term solution as well.

Advanced Practice Providers in Rural Healthcare

Advanced practice providers play a critical role in rural healthcare, particularly in primary care. Not only do they enrich the quality of care provided, but they also are responsible for meeting the needs of patients who otherwise have limited access to care, if any at all.

The National Conference of State Legislatures underscores the value that advanced practice providers offer to rural America. More than **40%** of rural Medicare patients received care from a nurse practitioner or physician assistant. And, another study found that almost **11%** more patients in rural areas were seen exclusively by these providers in contrast to their urban counterparts.

As aging physicians retire and rural recruitment becomes more challenging, rural healthcare organizations are increasingly turning to advanced practice providers to fill the gaps. Nearly **half** of these organizations already employ at least one **nurse practitioner**. And, **one in four** rural healthcare providers are nurse practitioners.

- Of the 158 advanced practice providers who responded to the survey, the data shows that they are just as likely as physicians to be persuaded to practice in a rural location with higher compensation and flexible hours. Incidentally, these same factors also impact their decision to stay for at least the next five years with 62% asking for higher compensation and 43% desiring a more flexible schedule.
- There are some differences, however, between advanced practice providers and physicians in terms of what would influence them to consider a rural practice opportunity. They are more likely than physicians to consider rural practice if given the opportunity to use telehealth (45% vs. 17%), are offered loan repayment (43% vs. 18%), or are able to spend more time with patients (33% vs. 15%).
- Advanced practice providers also appear slightly more willing to consider locum tenens as an opportunity to 'try out' a rural practice location (82% vs. 72%).
- When attempting to recruit these providers, understand that they place a higher value on work/life balance in terms of cultural attributes than do physicians (44% vs. 29%).
- Rural ties may also ease their transition. They are more likely than the physicians we surveyed to have been raised in a rural community (38% vs. 25%). And, they are almost twice as likely to have extended family in the community where they are working (33% vs. 19%).

The opportunity to create **stability in rural care teams** appears high with advanced practice providers. Of those surveyed, half of them plan to work 16 years or more before retiring.

By taking these differences into account, rural healthcare organizations will be better positioned to recruit these providers.

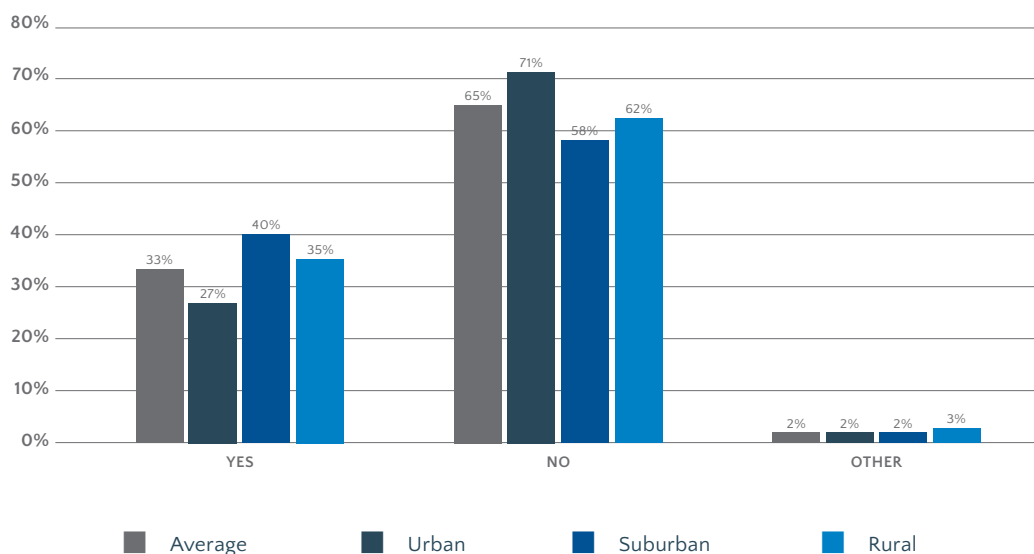


COVID-19 Has Influenced Physicians in More Ways Than One

We know that physicians have reported higher levels of stress and burnout during the pandemic than at any other time in their careers, and large numbers of physicians have stated that they are considering leaving their current employer for another, retiring early or leaving the practice of medicine entirely. Jackson Physician Search released the results of two surveys in 2021 – [one early in the year](#) and the [other later](#) – and found that physicians' sentiments regarding their changing career plans had only grown. In this survey, about a third of physicians – regardless of current practice location – said COVID-19 has accelerated their retirement plans.

Physicians:

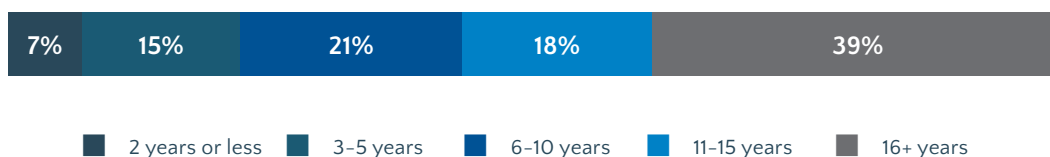
Did COVID-19 accelerate your retirement plans?



With physician retirements expected to rapidly rise, it's critical to initiate discussions early with these physicians. In a previous [physician retirement survey](#), Jackson Physician Search learned that just 52% of physicians were comfortable with starting the retirement discussion with their administrators. Also concerning was that 40% of physicians felt six months or less retirement notice was acceptable, rarely enough time to recruit and onboard a replacement. Yet more promising is the reality that nearly 30% of surveyed physicians said they intend to work part-time as a transition strategy to eventual full retirement. It's clear that early and transparent discussions provide rural healthcare organizations with the best opportunity to minimize lengthy vacancies.

Physicians:

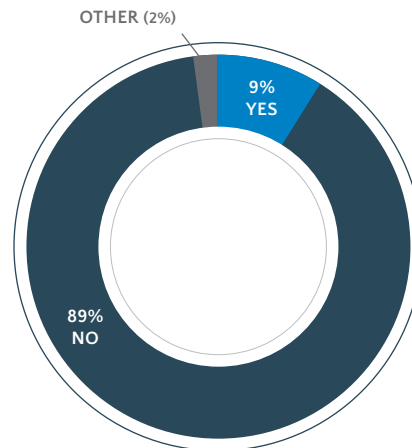
How long do you plan to work before retiring?



We also wanted to understand if physicians became more interested in a rural opportunity as a result of the pandemic. We asked, is COVID-19 the reason for your move to a rural healthcare setting? Nine percent affirmed that the pandemic was the primary motivator for their move.

Physicians:

Was COVID-19 the reason you chose to practice in a rural location?



"It's possible that we'll look back and recognize that COVID-19 was the turning point for many physicians to give a rural practice a try. We've already seen an increase in physicians who are accepting rural positions as a way to move closer to family, find more balance between their professional and personal lives, or to escape the cities where the pandemic at first appeared more rampant," said Stajduhar. "This survey offers compelling insight that those in rural healthcare administration should heed as they approach their medical staffing plans."

Recruiting physicians to work in rural healthcare settings is increasingly urgent, given the imminent retirement of Baby Boomers and those exhausted by the pandemic. Fortunately, this could prove to be the best time to recruit providers away from the cities and suburbs. But as the data shows, competitive compensation may be the tipping point for those who choose to explore the opportunity and those who decline.

"It's sometimes hard for people who live in larger cities to imagine the challenges facing rural facilities," said Stajduhar. More than 16 years ago, I helped a hospital in Pocatello, Idaho build its interventional cardiology program. At the time, patients who needed open heart surgery had to be airlifted to another hospital, and sadly, some didn't have good outcomes. I found an interventional cardiologist who had a large family and wanted to live in an area with a lower cost of living while earning really good money. And, if he could be near the mountains, all the better. When I presented this opportunity, he jumped at it. In fact, we ended up recruiting a few cardiologists. I can't imagine the number of lives saved in that community."



Marketing Job Opportunities by Generation

Generational Differences Contribute to Physician Sentiment and Provide a Roadmap for More Efficient and Effective Physician Recruitment in Rural Healthcare

As part of the survey, physician respondents were asked to select a year range in which they were born. This data allowed us to better understand the needs, wants and desires of physicians specific to their corresponding generation: Baby Boomer, Generation X or Millennial.

We've long known that in physician recruitment, taking a one-size-fits-all approach to candidate sourcing is the least efficient and often the least effective way to attract an adequate number of qualified physician candidates.

Given that there are some statistically significant differences between generations, this survey provides additional insight that allows you to develop more targeted physician sourcing strategies in order to better compete in today's competitive market. Below we'll consider best practices on marketing rural physician job opportunities to Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials.



Baby Boomers

Forty-nine percent of Baby Boomer physicians will retire in less than five years and another 35% will retire in 6–10 years. Many are seeking to slow down. Nearly half of them have been at their current location for 11 years or more, and what would most entice them to stay there is higher compensation and the ability to eventually work part-time or flexible hours.

We know from the data that Baby Boomers are more likely than Gen Xers and Millennials to currently work in a rural location, and they were prompted to make that decision based on the need for flexibility, as well as the desire to spend more time with patients. They are also the most likely to have worked a locum tenens job in a rural location, and for those not currently working in a rural setting, Baby Boomers say they are more likely to consider a locum tenens job in a rural location to “try it out” – 83% would definitely, probably consider or possibly consider a locum tenens assignment in a rural location. In addition, Baby Boomers are:

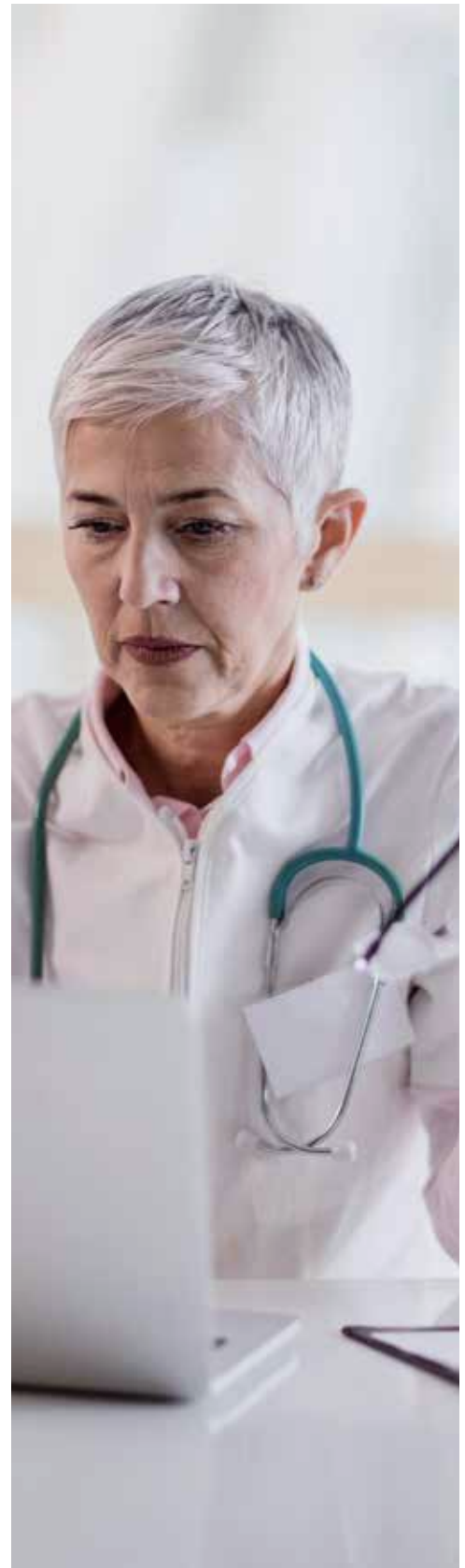
- Most likely of all the generations to say patient-focused (37%) is the most important attribute of an organization’s culture
- More likely than Millennials to say the ability to work part-time or flex hours (44% vs. 30%) would motivate them to stay at their current organization

Retaining Baby Boomer Physicians and Tips for Marketing New Job Opportunities

Most healthcare organizations have physicians that belong to this generation. And as these doctors start considering what easing into retirement looks like for them, it’s important that administrators keep the lines of communication open. Start retirement discussions early to learn what their plans include. Since many are interested in part-time work, offer them an opportunity to explore it with your organization before they go elsewhere.

Conversely, use this same approach as a physician recruitment strategy to minimize any gaps in your medical staffing plan, whether it be a permanent position or a locum tenens assignment. Create and advertise flexibility in work schedules. You could even consider partnering with healthcare organizations in neighboring towns to create a job-sharing position. This is an effective strategy when recruiting specialists for which you don’t necessarily need full-time. Not only does this allow you to bring a wider spectrum of care to your community, but it also creates the opportunity for part-time work.

Finally, remember that this generation values a patient-focused organization more than the others. When advertising your job opportunities, share how your organizational structure and compensation plan allow physicians to spend more time with patients. One of the many great benefits of a rural practice opportunity is a culture where physicians play a key role in the community. By sharing physician/patient stories on your website and social media channels, you cement the idea that a patient-focused culture is a core value.





Generation X

Of all generations in practice, Gen X physicians are the least fulfilled, both professionally and personally. Half of them have been at their current location for 3–10 years, and two-thirds say that COVID-19 has accelerated their retirement plans – and that they are roughly 11–15 years away from retirement.

Physician autonomy, work/life balance and teamwork are important to them. Over half indicate they would at least consider ‘trying out’ a rural location with a locum tenens assignment, and a higher salary, work/life balance and the ability to work part-time or flex hours may help them to consider making that trial permanent. Other characteristics to note:

- More likely than Baby Boomers to say their spouse is a physician (12% vs. 5%)
- More likely than Baby Boomers to be detractors or dissatisfied when it comes to professional fulfillment (43% vs. 31%) and personal fulfillment (47% vs. 36%)

Marketing Job Opportunities to Gen Xers and Effective Physician Retention Strategies

We know that Gen X physicians have particular wants and needs, including a greater desire for work/life balance, an interest in integrating telehealth into their practice and the desire for additional paid time off. This makes sense when you consider that Gen Xers have already – or soon will become – empty nesters. Not only does this mean a significant relocation may be less complicated for them compared to their younger counterparts, but it also means they’re beginning to think about how they want to spend this next phase of life. When advertising your job opportunities to Gen Xers, you can get their attention with competitive compensation coupled with increased flexibility to allow more time for the pursuit of personal interests.

While it’s a bit disheartening to learn that this generation is the least fulfilled, it also creates an opportunity for your organization to stand out by sharing employee success stories that show your organization prioritizes physician fulfillment. While the majority of candidates are passive candidates who aren’t actively searching for a new opportunity, if a physician job ad promoting what is most valuable to them lands in their email inbox, it may hit just the right note and lead to a reply.

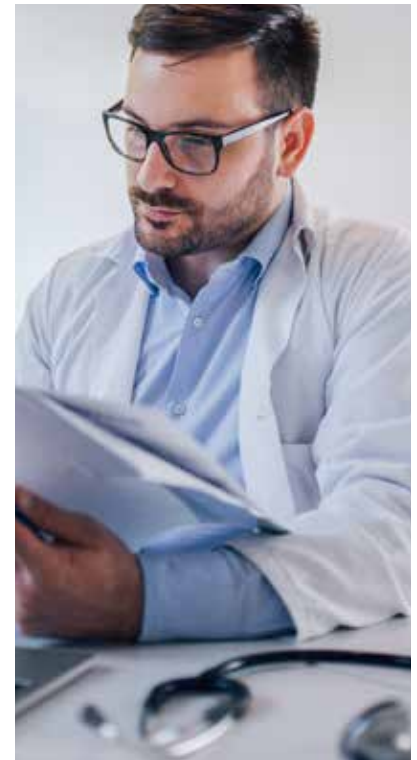
Another consideration for your physician candidate acquisition strategy includes demonstrating your team-based culture. If your organization is particularly strong in collaborative decision making, has a collegial team and has earned a high level of physician engagement, share this with prospective candidates in your job ads and especially during [on-site interviews and community tours](#).

To retain physicians of this generation, compensation is always going to be a factor, but so is creating leadership opportunities. Gen Xers bring an incredible amount of experience to a team. Find new ways for your physicians to challenge themselves and grow within their careers, while adding increased value to the organization. These additional responsibilities also typically justify the higher compensation they are seeking.

Millennials

Millennials haven't been working as long, and some of them are still residents or fellows. Work/life balance is even more important to this cohort than it is to Gen X physicians. More than one-third would definitely or very probably consider a locum tenens assignment to 'try out' a rural location, and they may be enticed to stay with work/life balance, an offer of loan repayment, additional PTO, a good place to raise a family, and a strong organizational culture (that allows them autonomy and participatory decision-making). Factors in their decision to relocate would be their current proximity to family, friends and colleagues, and the fact that almost 2 in 10 (18%) are married to a physician. Additionally:

- Almost all – 94% – of Millennials have been working in their current location for 5 years or less, and 82% plan to retire in 16 years or more. They have a long career ahead of them.
- Over two-thirds, or 71%, would be willing to consider a locum tenens assignment to 'try out' practicing in a rural area.
- They're more likely than Baby Boomers to say that extended family live in or near the community where they are living (22% vs. 16%) and that former classmates or colleagues live nearby (16% vs. 7%).
- They are also more likely than Baby Boomers and Gen Xers to say their spouse is a physician (18% Millennials vs. 5% Boomers and 12% Gen X).



Marketing Job Opportunities to Millennials and Retaining Them Long Term

Millennials may still be looking for the arc of their career to take shape. Not unique to the healthcare industry, we've long known that work/life balance is a major driver for this generation. Given that Millennials may also still be planning to have a family – or have young children already – finding a good place to raise a family that includes a strong organizational and family-friendly culture is likely to be compelling. Factors in their decision to relocate would be access to a strong support network that includes being in close proximity to family and friends.

Additionally, since this generation is more likely than Baby Boomers and Gen Xers to have a physician spouse/partner, recruiting both is likely to increase your success rate. Recognizing that not all organizations have two job opportunities available to bring on both physicians, one strategy is to collaborate with nearby organizations that are also recruiting. Network with these organizations to create a win-win physician candidate referral strategy.

We also know from those already working in a rural location that a strong organizational culture (29%) is compelling. Think about your CEO's role in the on-site interview process. They are the ones driving the culture and are in the best position to win over younger physicians.

Given that Millennials are even more likely than Generation X to be actively seeking employment, using digital candidate sourcing strategies that include messaging that acknowledges their wants, needs and desires will help your organization stand out from the crowd. Social media is a powerful recruitment tool, with platforms like Dexterity offering the best results.

Locums tenens can also be a particularly compelling strategy to attract Millennial candidates, as 25% indicate they would "definitely consider" a trial position in a rural area, and 39% would very probably consider it. While you might think of locum tenens placements as a temporary measure, it's possible that it's a temporary candidate who is a good fit for your position could opt to stay permanently. When you factor the opportunity to recruit and place someone who plans to work for another 20 years, you can begin to see the benefits of that upfront investment.

Retaining Millennials long-term provides much-needed stability for healthcare organizations and the communities they serve. Since this group is more likely than the others to be carrying large student loan debt, they are likely to value loan pay off as a worthy benefit in exchange for a practice commitment.

Summary

Rural Recruitment Best Practices

Nearly three-quarters of practicing physicians are considered passive candidates, meaning they are open to new opportunities but not actively searching for them. Passive job seekers are looking for a better practice opportunity to find them. They are only willing to change jobs for an improvement over their current position.

Passive candidates won't call you or post their CV online, but we know that [97% of physicians](#) prefer to receive job opportunities by email and [75%](#) want them sent to their personal email address.

A digital recruiting approach utilizing email, social media, and widespread use of physician job boards has replaced direct mail and enables you to increase recruitment ROI, change your message without cost, and get your open opportunities to a large, targeted audience quickly and over a longer time horizon.

[Digital recruitment](#) also affords physician recruiters the tools to customize each job ad for different target audiences. Rather than using one message for all generations and their current practice locations, you can promote the benefits of your organization in a way that is most appealing to each group. Such a strategy can help you catch the attention of someone who might not be actively looking but whose eye has caught the proverbial "dream job." Rural healthcare organizations need to maximize every opportunity available. Small changes in your job ads could make a big difference in the number of candidates who express interest.

On the other hand, physicians who are actively seeking a new position are a smaller segment (11%) of the candidate pool. Active candidates do post their CVs, search online for opportunities and respond to email and job postings. This group of candidates is also contacted most frequently with job offers. It takes deliberate effort to stand out amongst the crowd when trying to attract active physician candidates.

In order to reach these candidates, your job posting needs to be distinctive and posted where they are looking. A strong physician candidate acquisition strategy includes job boards like [Health eCareers](#), [PracticeLink](#) and [NEJM](#) to mention a few. [LocumTenens.com](#) offers an extremely robust job board where you can post locums, permanent and locum-to-permanent opportunities. You should also include social media platforms like [Doximity](#) where more than 80% of physicians have claimed their profile. Doximity also features a job board and the ability to reach out directly to physicians who meet your criteria through DocMails. Most importantly, format your job posting correctly and write it with the ideal candidate in mind. And remember that the majority of physicians will decide whether they want to learn more about a job opportunity based on the headline. Do include the specialty, the location and a key selling point.

Continuous Recruitment

Regardless of the career stage of your target recruits, continuous recruitment as a practice can increase your efficiency and effectiveness. Make the effort to extend your networking reach to nearby communities with medical schools, so that you are consistently top-of-mind with placement counselors. The goal is to have a pipeline you can draw from when faced with a planned or unplanned physician vacancy.

And for those who do use locum tenens to fill gaps in their medical staffing, make an effort to ask these visiting providers about their long-term career goals. Develop a system for keeping in touch regularly. When they do decide to plant roots, the connection you've forged could work in your favor. Do the same with residents who train at your facility.

Hiring for Fit

If you're facing ongoing physician vacancies, it can be tempting to make hires outside your typical candidate profile, but you don't want to risk investing in someone who is not well-positioned to be a "fit" for the position. Hiring for fit is a recruitment philosophy that aims to [increase retention rates](#). During the qualitative portion of our survey, we heard from administrators who are not as challenged by recruiting physicians and the advice was clear: If you're realistic about the opportunity you have before you, offer a competitive salary, focus your efforts on candidates who are keen to make a rural move, and on those whose personal values are well-aligned with your organizational values, you will be more successful.

As recruiters, we ask a lot of questions when we are working with candidates and hiring teams because we know that alignment between what you have to offer and the wants, needs and desires of the physician candidate means there's a lower chance of physician burnout and better likelihood that you'll engage physicians for the long run. Matching the needs of the physician pool with your organizational vision and values can feel like a moving target, but the work you do up front to create alignment can help ensure commitment to your principles as well as a great long-term, cultural fit.

About Jackson Physician Search

Jackson Physician Search is an established industry leader in physician recruitment and pioneered the recruitment methodologies standard in the industry today. The firm specializes in the permanent recruitment of physicians, physician leaders and advanced practice providers for hospitals, health systems, academic medical centers and medical groups across the United States. Headquartered in Alpharetta, Ga., the company is recognized for its track record of results built on client trust and transparency of processes and fees. Jackson Physician Search is part of the Jackson Healthcare® family of companies. For more information, visit jacksonphysiciansearch.com.

About LocumTenens.com

LocumTenens.com specializes in the temporary placement of physicians, advanced practitioners and psychologists at healthcare facilities across the U.S. through onsite and telehealth services. As the industry's most-visited job board, LocumTenens.com helps healthcare organizations connect with the medical professionals they need to ensure patients have access to quality care. Founded in 1995, LocumTenens.com is a leader in the healthcare staffing industry, helping place clinicians who deliver care to more than seven million patients in over 2,400 healthcare facilities in the U.S. LocumTenens.com is a Jackson Healthcare® company. Learn more at locumtenens.com/about.

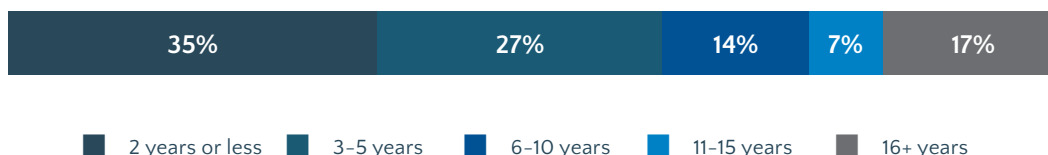


Survey Methodology and Demographics

The survey was conducted in October 2021 by Jackson Physician Search and LocumTenens.com. Physicians, advanced practice providers and administrators from the companies' databases were invited to participate in the survey via email. Participating respondents were incentivized with access to the resulting white paper. In total, 1,311 physicians, 169 administrators and 158 advanced practice providers participated in the survey, yielding 880 physicians, 60 administrators and 92 advanced practice providers who completed the entire survey.

Physicians:

How long have you been practicing at your current location?



CURRENT WORK SITUATION		GENERATION	
Full-time, employed, permanent position	57%	Silent Generation	2%
Self-employed	17%	Baby Boomers	35%
Work in a single location	14%	Generation X	34%
Working in a temporary position (locum tenens)	12%	Millennials	28%
Part-time, employed, permanent position	10%	GENDER	
Work for a single employer in multiple locations	8%	Male	57%
Resident or completing fellowship training	7%	Female	39%
Own or retain an ownership stake in a practice	7%	Prefer not to say	3%
Other	5%		

ADMINISTRATOR DEMOGRAPHICS – JOB FUNCTION/TITLE			
CEO/President/Administrator	32%	Chief/Director/Department Leader	15%
COO/CMO/CFO	13%	Physician Recruiter/HR	40%

Note: All data percentages cited in this report are verified and correlated to the number of responses. Some of those surveyed did not answer every survey question.