

Vox Medici

Why we chose this career



Vox Medici

LocumTenens.com was inspired to create this *ebook series* by our perception that in the midst of all the heated rhetoric surrounding healthcare, there is one voice that is eerily quiet—the doctor’s voice. Pundits, politicians, and insurance companies have had (and continue to have) their say, but doctors tell us time and again that they feel that they do not have a seat at the debate table. This is their chance to be heard, and it is our privilege to give them a forum. At LocumTenens.com the quality of our doctors is the strength of our business, and we would like to say *thank you*.

Letter from the President

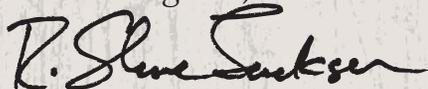
Dear Readers,

2009 and 2010 produced unprecedented focus on the healthcare industry. The healthcare community and society at large were polarized in their views on the so-called healthcare reform debate, with few able to agree on what the problems are, much less the solutions.

LocumTenens.com conducts several physician surveys each year on various subjects. In the midst of the healthcare reform debate, we decided to add a question to a survey on a completely different subject. The question was, “What was the defining moment or experience that led you to choose a career in medicine?” The answers were surprisingly forthright, sometimes humorous and often refreshing. The short answers physicians provided to this innocuous question reminded us all of why we chose a career in healthcare and helped me at least re-humanize our most human of industries. It also gave insight into the people who help us make some of the most important decisions in our life, the people who drive healthcare.

I hope you are informed and enlightened by the data covered in the following pages, but more importantly, I hope you enjoy reading some of the stories behind the numbers. And I hope it helps us all appreciate the physicians in our lives and understand a little more why they do what they do.

Warm regards,



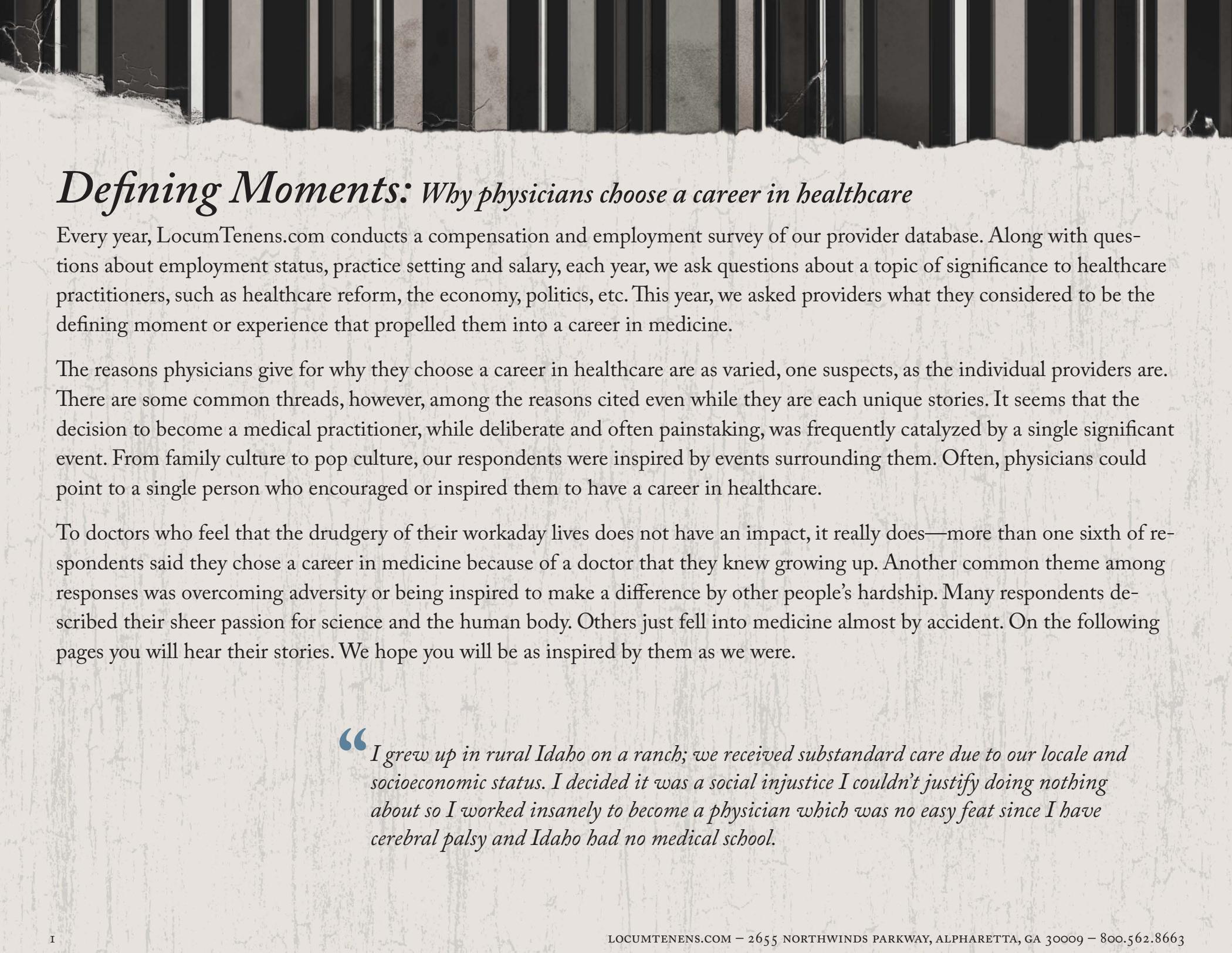
R. Shane Jackson

President

LocumTenens.com

Contents

Defining Moments	I
What You Learn as a Child	2
The Accidental Doctor	3
The Career Changers	4
A Family Matter	5
An Investment in Knowledge	6
Out of Suffering, the Passion to Heal	7
A Cause Greater than Themselves	8
Staying Power	9
Before & After	10
Enthusiasm Scale	11
At the End of the Day	13
Appendix: Defining Moments by the Numbers	14



Defining Moments: Why physicians choose a career in healthcare

Every year, LocumTenens.com conducts a compensation and employment survey of our provider database. Along with questions about employment status, practice setting and salary, each year, we ask questions about a topic of significance to healthcare practitioners, such as healthcare reform, the economy, politics, etc. This year, we asked providers what they considered to be the defining moment or experience that propelled them into a career in medicine.

The reasons physicians give for why they choose a career in healthcare are as varied, one suspects, as the individual providers are. There are some common threads, however, among the reasons cited even while they are each unique stories. It seems that the decision to become a medical practitioner, while deliberate and often painstaking, was frequently catalyzed by a single significant event. From family culture to pop culture, our respondents were inspired by events surrounding them. Often, physicians could point to a single person who encouraged or inspired them to have a career in healthcare.

To doctors who feel that the drudgery of their workaday lives does not have an impact, it really does—more than one sixth of respondents said they chose a career in medicine because of a doctor that they knew growing up. Another common theme among responses was overcoming adversity or being inspired to make a difference by other people's hardship. Many respondents described their sheer passion for science and the human body. Others just fell into medicine almost by accident. On the following pages you will hear their stories. We hope you will be as inspired by them as we were.

“I grew up in rural Idaho on a ranch; we received substandard care due to our locale and socioeconomic status. I decided it was a social injustice I couldn't justify doing nothing about so I worked insanely to become a physician which was no easy feat since I have cerebral palsy and Idaho had no medical school.”

What You Learn as a Child

Over 43% of our respondents knew as children that they wanted a career in healthcare, either from innate interest or because of some experience or series of experiences that led them into the medical field. Some respondents could remember a specific book, class or teacher responsible for stirring up their interest in medicine. A handful of respondents cited pop culture icons like Marcus Welby as their inspiration. Undeniably what you learn and experience during childhood can have a lasting impact on your choices as an adult, as it did with these people.

“ *Wanted to be an MD since I was 5 and received a nurse’s kit for Christmas.* ”

“ *From age 8 was planning on a medical career. Mother’s friend left a medical text at the house. I devoured it and never looked back.* ”

“ *Reading ‘The First Woman Ambulance Surgeon’ when I was in the third grade.* ”

“ *Age 13 – wanted to have a profession that allowed me to contribute to well-being of others after first contact with someone with AIDS.* ”

“ *At age 17, a vet let me do a spay on a small dog.* ”

“ *I was the first person in my family to attend college at the encouragement of a high school teacher. It was that teacher who encouraged me to become a physician. I felt that to be my greatest aspiration. It was and still is.* ”

The Accidental Doctor

While some physicians chose a career in medicine based on careful deliberation, there are those that fell into healthcare by chance. Surprisingly, almost 1% of respondents to our survey said they chose a career in medicine to avoid the draft. Below are some of their stories.

“*draft lottery #26*

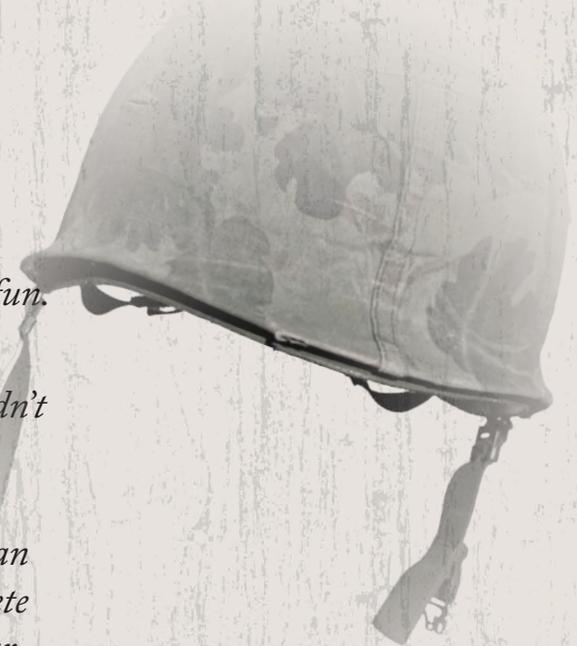
“*A dare from a fellow Pharmacist...*

“*I knew pro tennis was not in the cards.*

“*Serendipity. All of my best friends in college were pre-med and it seemed like fun.*

“*Love my career, but the reality is I didn't have anything better to do, and I didn't want to go to Viet Nam.*

“*I was turned down for a radiology technician program, so I decided to pursue an AA degree rather than an AS degree, got that, thought I might be able to complete undergraduate work, did so, never expected any medical school to take a 38 year old, got lucky and got in. I'd like to say I had a master plan, but it was somewhere between a calling and dumb luck.*



The Career Changers

Four percent of our respondents had prior experience in healthcare that led them to choose to go to medical school. Those respondents realized, on the basis of those experiences that they had a passion or a knack for healing. Another contingent of respondents, nearly three percent, actually tried a different line of work before realizing that their true interests lay in healthcare.

“When I figured out that I was not going to be a rock and roll star.

“Biomed Engineering grad school: Was doing my thesis on microtransport in dog model...started operating, and fell in love with surgery.

“In 1973, I was working with Eastern Airlines which merged with CaribAir. I lost my seniority, so I pursued a long postponed goal of becoming an M.D.

“I worked in coal mines, a steel mill, as a truck driver—had some experience helping people and enjoyed it so much that I left my chemical engineering work and went into medicine.

“Finished two theological degrees including a doctorate and could address spiritual and psychological issues but not organic systemic disease. My mother was an RN, and SO MANY of my colleagues and friends were in medicine, so I jumped right in and have never regretted it!

“I originally thought I wanted to be a politician or an attorney. After working for a U.S. Senator in the company of lawyers, I couldn't stand the people or the games that were played. After taking stock of who I was and what kind of challenges excited me, I began gravitating toward a career in science or medicine.

A Family Matter

Many of our respondents were profoundly influenced by their families to seek a career in healthcare. Many of them had family members, especially parents, who were doctors. Others got the classic prod from parents who aspired to have a doctor as a son or daughter. One respondent was motivated to become a doctor because an uncle told him he couldn't do it!

“ *It was a toss-up between being an Episcopal priest and a physician. My wife did not want to be married to a priest.* ”

“ *Dad said I needed a trade.* ”

“ *My father is a surgeon. One day a patient ran up to him crying and thanking him for saving her life.* ”

“ *Laying tar on a roof at 116 degrees in the desert with no water...only my father's hot coffee and advice to work hard in school.* ”

“ *Influenced as small child of immigrant parents regarding how important my doctor was.* ”

“ *My mother talked about a doctor she admired and stated maybe one of her children would become a doctor and take care of her in her old age. I thought that might be me.* ”

“ *I just knew from childhood, probably because I followed my country doctor father around his practice and saw how much he cared about his patients and what a difference he made in their lives and how much they adored him.* ”

A baby with dark hair and eyes is peeking over a white, textured paper barrier that has been torn at the top. The background behind the barrier consists of vertical black and white stripes.

An Investment in Knowledge

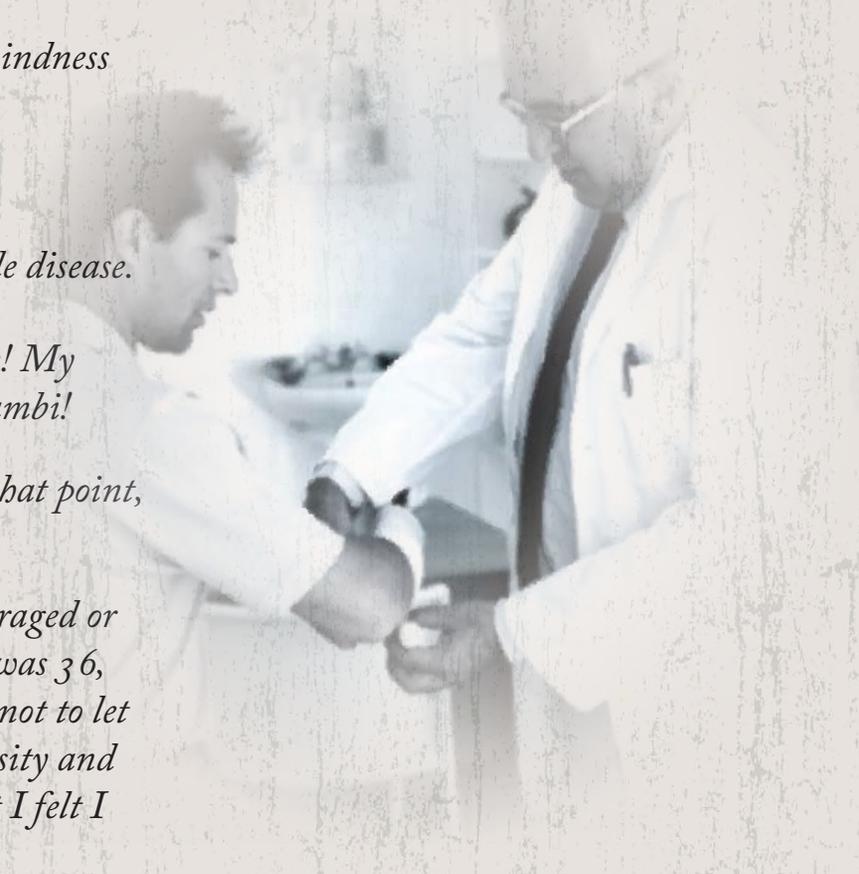
A cynic might say that financial remuneration is an insufficient motivator for a lifelong career. But our respondents, far from being unfeeling materialists, often gave poignant and moving answers explaining why money attracted them to medicine, from wanting to provide for their families to suffering financial hardship during their youth. These people saw medicine as a way to achieve the stability and prosperity that they longed for.

- “ *As a single mother with a baby, I needed a profession that would enable me to provide for her on a steady basis.* ”
- “ *Watching my sister go through a divorce and being left to support a child by herself. Did not want to have to worry about not being able to support myself or having to move back in with my parents.* ”
- “ *Watching my parents struggle financially on a blue collar income.* ”
- “ *Realizing that a bachelor's degree from a private university in no way prepared one to pay off student loans.* ”
- “ *Severe financial instability during childhood.* ”

Out of Suffering, the Passion to Heal

Fifteen percent of respondents cited first-hand experience with medical emergencies, disease or the death of a loved one as their main motivation for becoming doctors. A third of respondents in this category were profoundly affected by their own illnesses and were inspired by the healthcare providers that helped make them better.

- “Went into a hospital when my brother scalded his arm. Impressed by the kindness of the staff and doctors.”*
- “Sustained an injury at age 20 and helped the ER doc sew up my foot.”*
- “As a child, I was a farm laborer and watched a young child die of a curable disease.”*
- “I spent 6 weeks in the hospital at the age of 3 after being struck by a truck! My medical team was excellent! I actually remember my nurse’s name was Bambi!”*
- “When I had surgery at an early age and they didn’t expect me to live, at that point, I promised to go into medicine if I lived.”*
- “I always wanted to be a doctor from the time I was 12 but was not encouraged or assisted by my family to pursue an education beyond high school. When I was 36, my mom died young—never having fulfilled any of her dreams. I decided not to let that happen to me so I enrolled in community college then went to university and then to medical school. I just could not let my life end without doing what I felt I was put on this earth to do.”*



A Cause Greater than Themselves

Nearly 15% of respondents to our survey said wanting to help others motivated them to become doctors. Some respondents volunteered in health-related settings or were involved in overseas medical or humanitarian missions, like building an orphanage in India, as one respondent did. A handful of respondents grew up in developing countries and witnessed first-hand the poverty and suffering of the Third World. Those experiences inspired them to become healers.

“My grandmother was seen by a physician at the house where we had recently moved in and my father only had 20 dollars to offer as a down payment on the visit. The doctor turned to him and said, 'when I was a student, I did not have money to spare. Take care of grandma and consider this a gift of love.' I thought to myself, 'someday, I will be able to give the gift of love to someone else.

“The defining moment came as I finished my outpatient year of general medicine in the Dominican Republic. After enduring all the deprivations and suffering the abuses of the worst excesses of both the first and third world in how they treat sick people, I found that helping people and studying diseases was an impossible and noble task and that it was a vocation and not a job.

“As a Peace Corps volunteer in Ivory Coast, 1978, I wanted to make a difference as a physician.

“Army service, they taught me quite well the 'killing arts'; I decided that I wanted to help also.

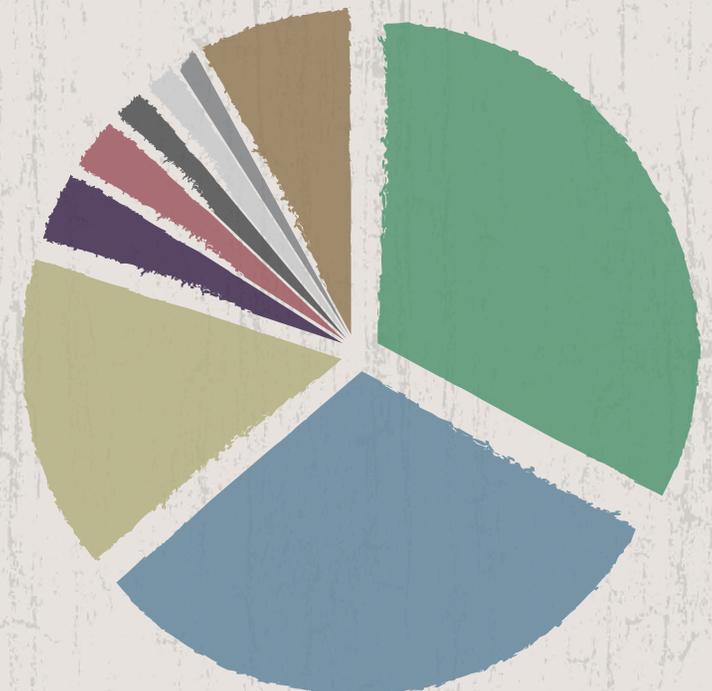
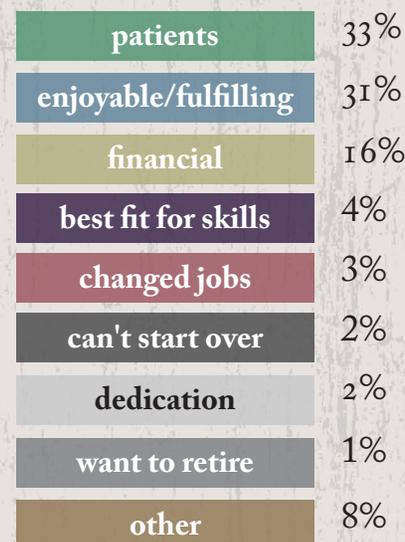
“Working with ill children during high school.

Staying power: What motivates physicians to stay in healthcare

We asked survey respondents to tell us why they continued to practice medicine. The largest group, 33%, stated that their patients were the reason they stay in healthcare. A slightly smaller percentage, 31%, said that their job is enjoyable or personally fulfilling. The third most popular reason cited for staying in the medical field was finances, given by 16% of respondents. These included needing to pay off student loans and not having enough saved up for retirement.

“*Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge and the unbearable pit for the suffering of mankind.*’
Bertrand Russell. All this is found in the medical field.

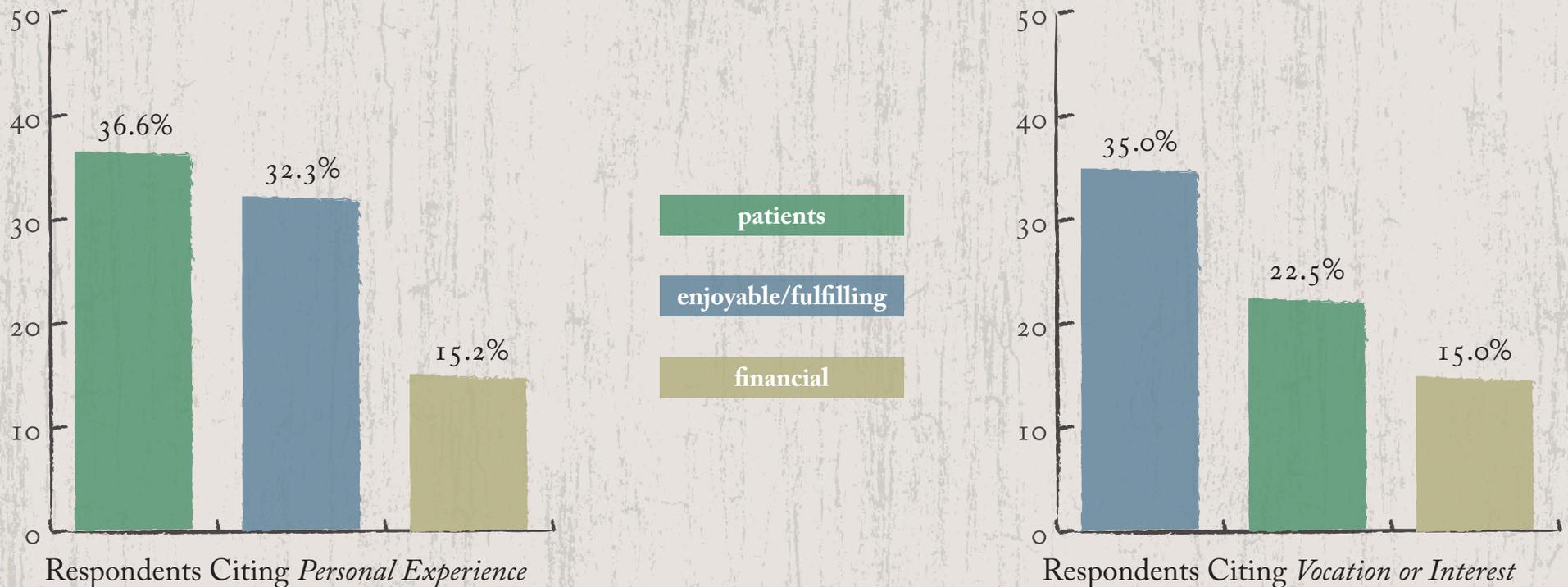
With all the pressure, stress, and ongoing changes in health-care, what drives you to continue practicing medicine?



Before & After: Personal Experience and Vocation

Respondents who said a personal experience had motivated them to become physicians were most likely to say their patients were the reason they stay in healthcare. Just under a third said their job is enjoyable or personally fulfilling. But 15% now say that financial reasons are their main motivation. Of the respondents who stated they had a vocation for or strong interest in medicine, nearly 35% say they still like their jobs. This group was considerably less motivated by patient interactions and slightly less motivated by financial reasons. It seems that a strong early avocation was a great indicator of future career satisfaction.

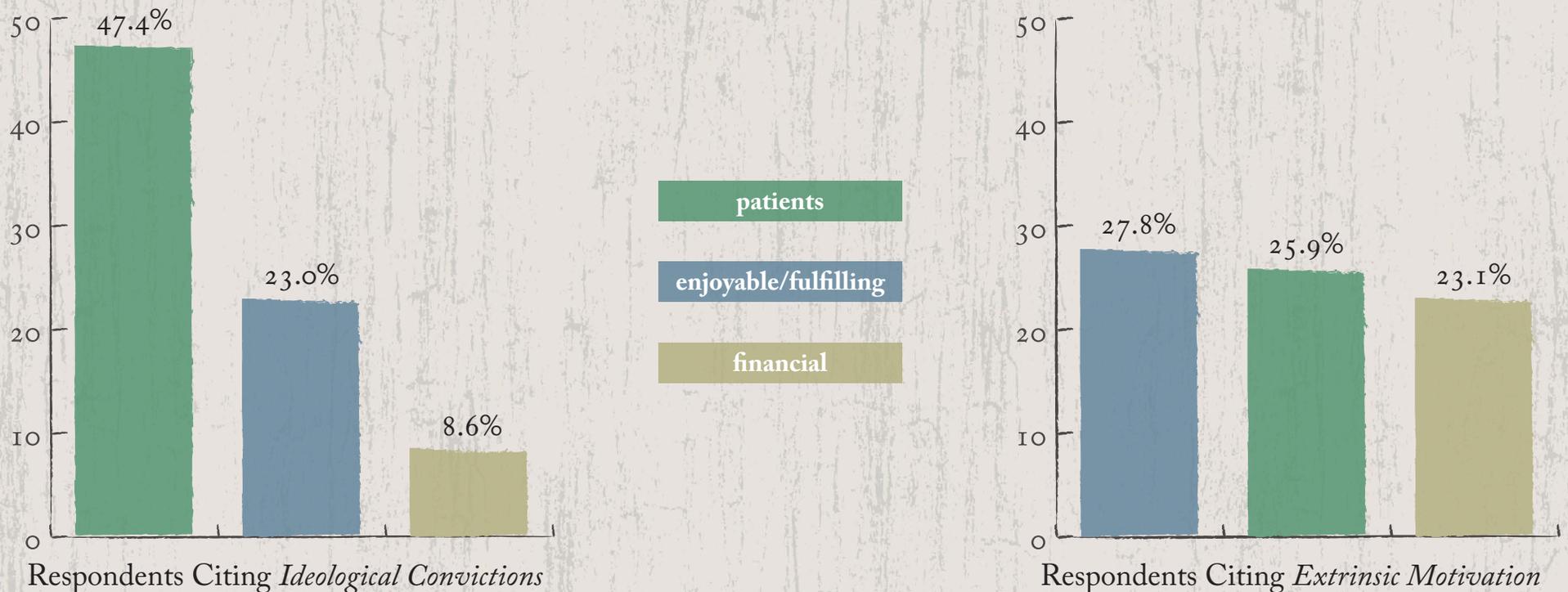
Top Three Reasons for Staying in Healthcare



Before & After: Ideological Convictions and Extrinsic Motivation

Respondents who cited ideological convictions, which included wanting to help others, as their motivation for choosing a career in healthcare were most likely to cite their patients as the reason they stayed in the medical field. In fact, nearly half of this group cited patients as their reason, the highest percentage among all of the groups. It appears that a strong desire to help others is also a good indicator of future career satisfaction. Those who gave extrinsic motivations or influences as their reason for becoming a doctor had the highest chance of citing financial reasons as their ongoing motivation to stay in healthcare, but it was still only the third highest reason cited by this group.

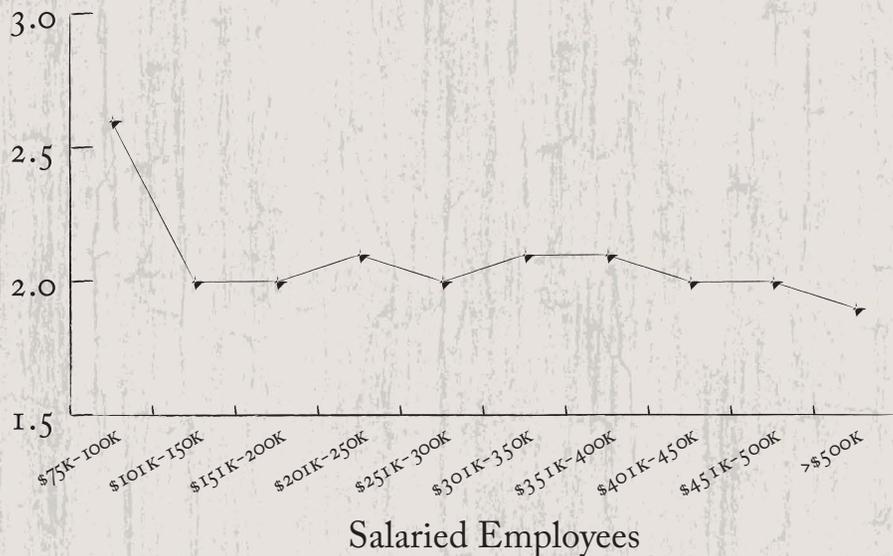
Top Three Reasons for Staying in Healthcare



Enthusiasm Scale

In order to gauge the current level of satisfaction with their careers, we ranked respondents' answers to the question *why they continue to practice medicine* on an enthusiasm scale (3 high to 1 low) based on the use of words that indicated a mid level of enthusiasm (*like, enjoy*) versus a high level of enthusiasm (*love, passion*, and intensifiers like *very* and *extremely*). People who were rated as having a low level of enthusiasm indicated that they were ready to get out of the profession or were extremely dissatisfied. The results of this admittedly subjective analysis were very interesting. Among salaried employees, respondents with the highest level of enthusiasm were in the lowest income bracket whereas respondents in the highest income bracket were the least enthusiastic. This phenomenon might result from the fact that providers at the highest end of the scale have been practicing for longer and may be more dissatisfied with the negative aspects of the field while respondents at the lower end of the scale may be recent graduates and providers working part time on a locum tenens or contract basis. On the other hand, respondents who were owners or partners in a practice did not show a clear pattern of enthusiasm and income level.

Current Level of Enthusiasm for Medical Field vs. Income Level





At the End of the Day

Unlike many careers, medicine galvanizes some of the most remarkable expressions of idealism among its disciples. While a percentage of physicians had lost some of their enthusiasm for their jobs, the vast majority were still happy with their choice. Sixty-four percent cited their patients or enjoyment as their reason for staying in their careers.

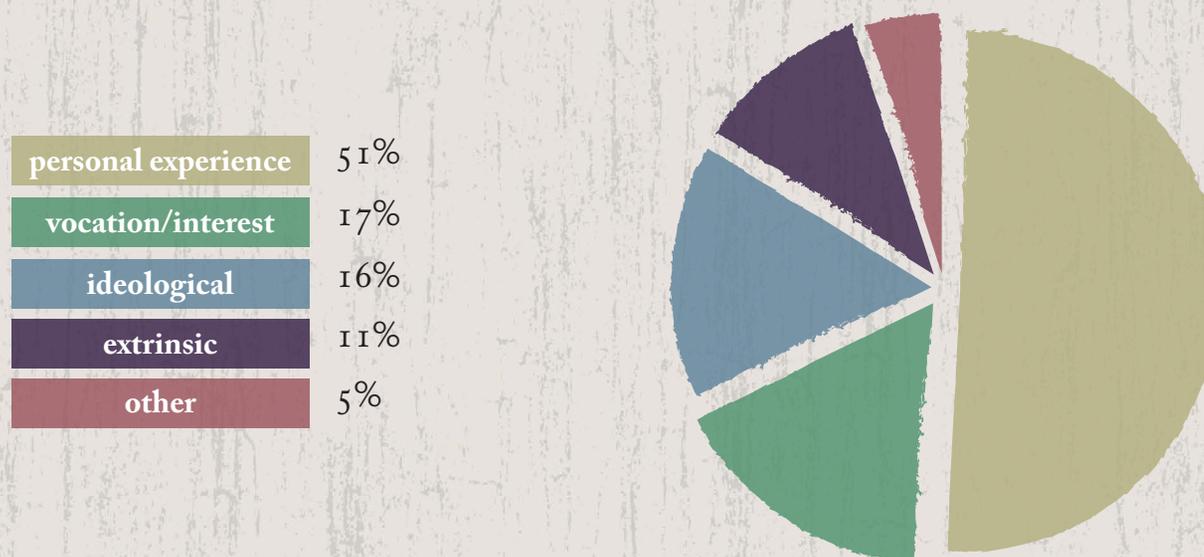
The doctor-patient relationship is a poignant one; they see us at our most vulnerable. But it is easy to forget as a patient that the relationship is emotionally reciprocal, for they derive an immense satisfaction from making us better. Perhaps that is why we can all think of a doctor that we have loved and admired.

Appendix: Defining Moments by the Numbers

LocumTenens.com's 2010 Compensation and Employment Survey received 1,442 physician responses, of which 1,128 provided the write-in comments that were used in this report.

A majority of respondents (51%) cited a **personal experience** or series of experiences that influenced them to choose a career in healthcare. More than 12% of respondents had a family member or a close mentor who was in healthcare. Many respondents were inspired as children by their pediatricians or family doctors. Nearly 14% cite their own illness or accident or the death or illness of a loved one as a defining moment. Four percent of respondents cited a specific experience in grade school or college that triggered their interest in medicine. Some tried on other careers or majors in college and somehow gravitated toward healthcare. Some got an early taste of a career in healthcare and decided to go to medical school.

Defining Moment Categories



Appendix: Defining Moments by the Numbers (cont.)

Vocation or interest was the reason cited by 17%, many of whom said they knew from a very young age, as low as 5 years old, that they loved medicine. Some of the 17% said realizing that they actually had the academic chops to get into medical school was what motivated them to try. Many said they had a passion for science; others craved the challenge that a medical career promised. Sixteen percent stated **ideological convictions** as the driving force behind their decisions. Of those, a large proportion said they had a strong desire to help others, especially the underserved. Many said they felt a strong spiritual or religious calling into medicine.

The fourth large category (11%) of respondents cited **extrinsic motivation or influences** that led them into a medical career. Of these, a majority said they got pressure or encouragement to become a doctor from family or another person close to them. Some were motivated by the admiration they expected to receive. A surprising one percent of respondents said they went to medical school to avoid being drafted into the military during Viet Nam. A very small fraction of the survey respondents, two percent, cited salary or financial reasons as their motivation for becoming a doctor. Various unrelated responses made up about five percent of responses.

Vox Medici: Why We Chose this Career by LocumTenens.com is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License

