



Finding a suitable locum

All too often, far less effort is put into finding a locum than filling a permanent veterinary position. This lack of discernment can cost a practice dearly. Locum vets are expected to work in an unfamiliar surgery and fit seamlessly into the existing staff team, often without support from more experienced colleagues. Locum staff need to be enthusiastic, dedicated and motivated, as there is usually little incentive for them to build good working relationships (with clients or staff) or to maintain turnover. An unsuitable locum can quickly destroy a client's trust and loyalty to a practice which have taken years to gain.

Obviously a candidate's clinical knowledge and experience is an important consideration, particularly if the locum is expected to work alone or without support. This experience must be broad, not simply in terms of the range of cases a candidate has treated but also to cope with differences in:

- practice equipment (different designs/models/brands);
- drugs stocked (different brand names, alternative products);
- practice protocols (particularly regarding hospital admissions, anaesthetic premed's).

Experience in a number of different veterinary practices is therefore a clear advantage and is likely to present a more adaptable vet. That said, the locum must have excellent "people" skills in order to slot into the practice team and deal with unfamiliar clients, so be wary of candidates who have passed through many jobs in a short period. Always contact their previous employer for an insight into their previous performance; speaking informally over the phone often gives a more accurate picture than requesting a written reference.

Regarding practice equipment, it is sensible to ask candidates whether they are familiar with your type of anaesthetic machine, X-ray unit, ultrasound scanner, etc. If your practice runs a computerised management system, also determine the candidate's experience with computers, particularly the system your practice uses.

Hire the locum a number of days before he/she is actually required - it is false economy to expect a locum to work efficiently from day one. It takes a few days for locum vets to find their way around the surgery and get to know staff and equipment before taking on full duties. It is vital that all staff in the practice have been instructed in advance to help the locum to feel welcome and supported - he/she must be made to feel part of the team for things to run smoothly.

Finally, if the locum vet is required to attend to visits (home/farm/stables), provision must be made to ensure he/she has good directions and a clear, up-to-date road map. Alternatively, consider investing in a GPS navigation system. These systems have become increasingly affordable and reliable in the last two years and are a good

investment for any practice doing visits, particularly if the practice is frequently employing vets on a locum basis.

If you are looking for a locum for your practice, click on the 'Find a vet' tab on the main VetRecruit website.