

2002

Review of Temporary Healthcare Staffing Trends and Incentives





Summary Report

2002 Review of Temporary Healthcare Staffing Trends and Incentives

Overview

This report marks the first Review of trends in temporary healthcare staffing presented by Med Travelers, a national traveler staffing firm, focusing on the temporary imaging technologist industry. Much of the information presented in the past regarding traveling imaging technologists was based upon anecdotal evidence. The purpose of this and future annual Reviews is to quantify trends and attitudes in the temporary healthcare staffing industry and provide a useful benchmark for imaging technologists and healthcare administrators alike.

The 2002 Review is based on search assignments and phone interviews with 1,130 administrators at healthcare facilities nationwide and 2,480 traveling imaging technologists. The data from search assignments was gathered during the 2001 calendar year, with follow-up interviews conducted between January 28 and February 15, 2002. The sample population of temporary imaging technologists represents an estimated 9% of the technologists working on a temporary basis during 2001.

The search assignments and survey responses included in this review come from all medical settings, including hospitals, groups, partnerships, and government facilities. The location of search assignments/survey respondents included facilities and providers in all regions, both rural and urban. The breakdown by region and population:

Healthcare facilities surveyed

Northeast (79) Middle Atlantic (130) Southeast (270) Southwest (136)
Midwest (248) West (267)

Rural 576
Urban 554

Imaging technologists surveyed

Northeast (174) Middle Atlantic (322) Southeast (396) Southwest (645) Midwest (546)
West (397)

Part I - The Traveling Imaging Technologist Industry

Traveling is a relatively recent career option. It refers to providers working on a temporary basis, filling immediate needs at healthcare facilities nationwide. Travelers typically work from one week to two months at a location before accepting another temporary opportunity.

The number of mid-level providers traveling continues to grow, largely due to financial and career control benefits. Yet well over half of all requested imaging days go unfilled, reflecting the severe shortage of technologists—both permanent staff and traveling. The fill rate figure represents an industry average, which includes all modalities and regions. As is the case with locum tenens, fill rates in the traveling industry vary greatly between specialties and regions. More than three of every four days of requested Mammography support are filled. Yet Rad Tech/Special Procedures fill rates barely top 15 percent.

Imaging Technologists Traveling 2001 (estimate): 27,720
Temporary Imaging Opportunities 2001 (estimate): 71,280
Days Unfilled 2001 (estimate): 1,529,748
Opportunities/Traveler: 2.57
Fill Rate: 39%

Top 10 Traveling Imaging Modalities, by Demand

Demand is measured by days requested for each modality. In 2001 demand for Radiologic Technologists was more than double that of Nuclear Medicine Technologists, the second most requested modality.

Modality	Demand	Opps/Tech	Rate Change
Radiologic Technologist	38%	2.37	+10%
Nuclear Med Technologist	17%	3.87	+21%
CT Technologist	13%	2.40	+12%
Ultrasound/Vascular Tech.	11%	3.16	+18%
Mammographer	7%	1.30	NC
Ultrasound Sonographer	4%	2.66	+10%
Echo Cardiography	3%	3.00	+12%
Rad Tech/Special Procedures	3%	5.12	+23%
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	2%	2.97	+15%
Radiation Therapist	2%	3.04	+15%

**Rate Change measures increase/decrease of traveler pay between 6/01 and 12/01*

The following portion of the 2002 review is based on search assignments and phone interviews with 2,480 traveling imaging technologists.

Who travels?

Gender

Male	42%
Female	58%

Years Experience

	Total	Male	Female
Just out of school/training	4%	1%	6%
1-5 years	48%	44%	50%
6-10 years	17%	24%	12%
11-20 years	12%	10%	14%
More than 21	19%	21%	18%
Ten or fewer	69%	69%	69%
11 or more	31%	31%	31%

How long have you worked as a traveler?

	Total	Male	Female
Less than 1 year	74%	66%	80%
1-3 years	21%	25%	18%
More than 3 years	5%	9%	2%

How long do you intend to work as a traveler?

	Total	Male	Female
Until I find a permanent position	17%	14%	19%
Less than 1 year	18%	10%	23%
1-3 years	16%	21%	13%
More than 3 years	49%	55%	45%

Are you currently looking for a permanent position?

	Total	Male	Female
Yes	15%	20%	12%
No	85%	80%	88%

How many firms do you work with?

	Total	Male	Female
None	38%	32%	42%
One	36%	24%	45%
2-3	23%	38%	12%
4 or more	3%	6%	1%

How do you select a firm? (more than one answer possible)

	Total	Male	Female
Pay rates/incentives	90%	72%	100%
Reputation/name recognition	39%	24%	50%
Location of opportunities	23%	23%	23%
Prompt opportunities	9%	10%	8%
Malpractice insurance/benefits	6%	10%	3%
Other	8%	10%	5%

Are you open to national travel?

	Total	Male	Female
Prefer home state/region	54%	43%	62%
Open	26%	43%	14%
No preference/answer	20%	14%	24%

What are the benefits of working as a traveler? (more than one answer possible)

	Total	Male	Female
Higher pay	68%	65%	71%
Flexibility	43%	35%	48%
Travel	39%	52%	29%
Be own boss/Control	24%	30%	19%
Tax benefits	15%	17%	14%
Different settings/exp.	13%	13%	14%
No politics	5%	4%	5%
Test drive	4%	9%	1%
Additional training	4%	1%	5%

What are the drawbacks of working as a traveler? (more than one answer possible)

	Total	Male	Female
Location of opportunities	14%	26%	6%
Away from home	14%	9%	18%
Lack of stability	11%	13%	10%
No benefits	7%	4%	10%
Quality of opportunities	5%	4%	5%
Travel	3%	1%	5%
None mentioned	46%	43%	46%

When selecting a firm, how important is malpractice insurance?

	Total	Male	Female
Not important	13%	17%	10%
Somewhat important	27%	13%	37%
Very important	30%	40%	24%
Never gave it any thought	30%	30%	29%

Part I - Trends and Observations

That diagnostic imaging technologists remain in great demand surprises no one in the healthcare field. Studies indicate that patients 65 and older use imaging services at three times the rate of younger patients, so the aging of the Baby Boom generation assures a significant level of demand for imaging procedures. At the same time, technical innovations, which allow Radiologists to perform a wider range of non-invasive procedures, also spur demand for imaging technologists. In addition, services such as vascular imaging, CT, and others must be performed by technologists registered in these specific modalities in order for reimbursement to be approved.

Yet the number of imaging technologists working in the traveling industry is currently insufficient to fill demand. More than 1.5 million vacant days went unfilled in 2001. Almost four opportunities exist for every temporary Nuclear Medicine Technologist. Nearly two and a half positions are open for every one Radiologic Technologist. Ultrasound Sonographers choose from three opportunities—statistically—each time they travel. Hourly rates for Nuclear Medicine Technologists jumped 21 percent over the second half of 2001.

The high level of demand has essentially skewed the market. Half of all traveling imaging technologists surveyed anticipate a long tenure in the temporary industry. Only 15 percent are currently searching for a permanent position. In contrast to the physician side of the temporary industry, travelers working a full schedule tend to earn more than their staff colleagues, and 68 percent list higher pay rates as a benefit of traveling.

We expect a certain amount of turmoil in the imaging market over the next few years. Technologists are increasingly taking advantage of continuing education opportunities as a means to advance their careers. Once trained in a new and more lucrative modality, they rarely step back into their previous roles. Many opt to travel while pursuing additional training, further skewing job market. These factors may intensify the shortage of travelers in certain modalities or create additional stress on the permanent recruiting market.

Part II - The Need For Travelers: Demand and Hiring

Healthcare facilities spent an estimate \$1.9 billion on locum tenens services in 2001. Data reflecting overall spending for traveling imaging technologist services may exceed that figure.

Clearly facilities have developed a level of reliance on temporary technologists. Administrators recognize that travelers offer strategic benefits—test marketing the need for a new position, for example—yet comparatively few seek temporary providers for reasons other than recruiting or vacation coverage.

The following portion of the 2002 review is based on search assignments and phone interviews with 1,130 administrators, directors, and others responsible for recruiting.

Why consider travelers? (More than one answer possible)

	Total
Hiring permanently	50%
Vacation coverage	42%
Increase in census	13%
CME coverage	8%
Tourism	5%
Test marketing need	3%
Other	5%

What are the benefits of using travelers?

	Total
Staffing shortage coverage	59%
No lost revenue	16%
Increased census coverage	10%
Prevent staff burnout	6%
No lost referrals	4%
Other	5%

What are the drawbacks of using travelers?

	Total
Cost	55%
Familiarity with practice	18%
Continuity of care	11%
State license/regulation delays	8%
Team commitment	4%
Other	4%

What times of year do you typically use travelers?

	Total
Summer	21%
Holiday (winter)	18%
Spring	15%
Fall	5%
Year-round	41%

How much time does it usually take to fill a temporary need? (measured from first day advertised to first day filled)

	Total
Less than 2 weeks	8%
3-4 weeks	26%
1-2 months	37%
More than 2 months	3%
Depends on season	26%

The following questions illustrate some of the differences in demand and hiring between communities and regions

How much time do you allow in your hiring process before you consider temporary providers?

	Total	Rural	Urban
Consider immediately	33%	32%	35%
Less than 1 month	21%	15%	27%
1-3 months	26%	34%	17%
More than 3 months	20%	19%	21%

By region:

	NE	MA	SE	SW	MW	W
Consider immediately	34%	37%	39%	41%	29%	25%
Less than 1 month	11%	21%	23%	20%	24%	19%
1-3 months	33%	16%	32%	10%	32%	25%
More than 3 months	22%	26%	6%	29%	15%	31%

What is your perception of the skill level of temporary providers?

	Total	Rural	Urban
Extremely well qualified	42%	40%	44%
Equal to current staff	43%	45%	40%
Below average	7%	8%	7%
No opinion	8%	7%	9%

By region:

	NE	MA	SE	SW	MW	W
Extremely well qualified	47%	53%	25%	34%	52%	46%
Equal to current staff	50%	23%	60%	39%	30%	46%
Below average	3%	3%	9%	10%	10%	6%
No opinion	0%	21%	6%	17%	8%	2%

How many staffing firms do you work with when recruiting temporary providers?

	Total	Rural	Urban
None	17%	17%	17%
One	11%	12%	11%
2-3	54%	56%	51%
4 or more	18%	15%	21%

By region:

	NE	MA	SE	SW	MW	W
None	1%	5%	3%	29%	18%	35%
One	4%	11%	8%	29%	9%	11%
2-3	58%	37%	69%	36%	64%	43%
4 or more	37%	47%	20%	6%	9%	11%

What are the most important factors in selecting a firm? (More than one answer accepted)

	Total	Rural	Urban
Quality of candidates	43%	45%	41%
Cost	30%	31%	29%
Prompt Placements	23%	18%	28%
Customer Service	16%	15%	17%
Availability of candidates	13%	7%	19%
Credentialing	11%	12%	11%
Reliability of firm	11%	8%	15%
Contract flexibility/parameters	9%	14%	4%
Individual recruiter	6%	4%	9%
Local candidates	5%	6%	4%
Other	7%	9%	5%

(Reputation of firm 3% Malpractice insurance 1%)

By region:

	NE	MA	SE	SW	MW	W
Quality of candidates	48%	33%	70%	26%	29%	41%
Cost	24%	26%	34%	23%	21%	41%
Prompt Placements	28%	31%	24%	25%	10%	26%
Customer Service	19%	21%	4%	18%	30%	11%
Availability of candidates	6%	24%	12%	15%	15%	7%
Credentialing	30%	4%	11%	4%	16%	9%
Reliability of firm	4%	3%	10%	4%	32%	4%
Contract flexibility/parameters	3%	7%	15%	5%	11%	6%

Part II - Trends and Observations

Part two of the 2002 Review illuminates important changes in the attitude toward traveling imaging technologists and their importance to healthcare facilities.

When considering a search for temporary providers, many facilities concentrate on cost. This is due in part to the rapid increases in hourly and daily rates as recruiters sought high-demand modalities. Some of that concern has subsided, however. Cost ranks second to quality of provider presented when facilities select a staffing firm, and promptness in placing a provider ranks a close third. This clear sense of urgency, and the fact that 59 percent of administrators surveyed consider coverage of staffing shortages as the key benefit of using temporary imaging technologists, underscores the recruiting difficulties facing many facilities. Depending upon the modality and location, facilities may spend six months or more recruiting a permanent technologist. The market for Radiologic Technologists, Nuclear Medicine Technologists, and Ultrasound Sonographers is highly competitive. As a result, 54 percent of those surveyed consider using temporary providers within a month of any vacancy, and often within days. It has become routine for facilities to request temporary services far in advance of vacations, continuing medical education, or known peak periods.

Despite the emphasis on immediate coverage, 41 percent of survey respondents recognize the strategic value of travelers, citing benefits such as maintaining revenue or patient flow, preventing any loss of referrals, and easing staff burnout. Yet the overwhelming majority of facilities continue to recruit temporary staff primarily to cover immediate shortages, including those resulting from vacations and continuing medical education.

Twenty years ago, many facilities were reluctant to employ travelers, especially from outside of their regions. Travelers were considered mediocre solutions, at least according to anecdotal reports. The survey, however, shows a complete departure from old notions. The overwhelming majority—85 percent—of administrators rate temporary imaging technologists as equal or even superior to existing staff. This transition occurred as the temporary staffing industry matured, added quality assurance and credentialing professionals, and developed expedited licensure procedures. In addition, more qualified providers became aware of the temporary career option.

One discouraging item of note: when asked the most important factors when selecting a staffing firm to assist temporary recruitment, only one percent of administrators cited malpractice insurance. Beginning in the fall of 2000, medical malpractice carriers began reevaluating their coverage of temporary staffing firms. The trend continued through 2001, as firms changed policies and insurers dropped out of the industry. The assurance of continued coverage is critical in an industry where healthcare facilities and providers work through several firms during the course of a year.

For more information regarding this survey, please contact:



Irving, Texas
(800) 788-4815

Salt Lake City, Utah
(800) 685-2272

www.med-travelers.com

5001 Statesman Drive Irving Texas 75063