
A FUNCTION OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND

MRI technologist explains the economics

of the travel market | BY STEVEN E. CARPENTER, BS, BA, RT(R)(MR)

When I started traveling in 1997, there were only a handful of travel companies. Since that time, the number has steadily risen; I recently counted over 40 agencies advertising in *ADVANCE*. The rise corresponds with a rise in the number of positions available across the country. The reason is simple: economics. High demand for technologists gives rise to more agencies, which in turn gives rise to more opportunities for technologists.

This environment exists for many reasons, but I think it's mostly because hospitals and clinics, in their efforts to save money, are paying less for technologists. As a result, technologists are willing to jump to better-paying jobs in a flash, leaving managers to constantly scramble for new technologists to help them deal with their high turnover.

When a manager loses a tech or two, he begins to wonder how his facility can possibly care for patients without qualified technologists.

The answer is simple — call the travel tech agency.

Traveling techs are typically well-trained and experienced in their specialty so that they can step into any situation and go right to work.

The traveling tech's main purpose is to quickly fill a vacancy. This vacancy may be due to more than just someone's quitting. Vacations, maternity leave, expanding needs,

extended sick leave, sabbaticals and simply poor planning are reasons a department might have vacancies. A well-trained traveling technologist is a much more economical choice than having to train someone who may or may not stay with the company. The shortage of techs has been growing; demand for the services of traveling technologists is sure to grow along with it.

How the business works

Travel techs work on a contract basis; they are hired to work at a certain place for a certain period of time. At the end of the contract, everything starts over. Contracts are negotiable, so there is an opportunity for a traveling technologist to improve her position each time the contract comes up for renewal. This is good for the technologist, as well as for the employer. The technologist retains more control of her life, and is therefore happier and more productive.

It helps to know where you want to work geographically, but don't be so rigid as to not accept a good position elsewhere. Different specialties are in greater demand than others — and this fluctuates — but generally speaking work is always available. I have been traveling now for five years and only once — in the beginning before I learned the ropes — was I out of work for more than a week. If one agency doesn't have the work you want, another will. Indeed, when I call, there are

often several positions available; some are more attractive than others, so the choice is usually easy. I am currently working in Palo Alto, California, and have been here twice during the past two years.

This does take a special type of person; suffice it to say traveling is not for the timid or inexperienced tech. But no one is excluded from becoming a traveling technologist as long as they prepare themselves properly.

I envision a day when we are all contract employees and the terms "permanent" and "temporary" fall by the wayside. If you like your situation, then you could contract to work five or 10 years. But, if you like to move around, you could contract for three or six months.

After climbing to the top of the ladder as a technologist, I reached a point where I asked myself, "Where do I go from here?" After some lengthy soul searching, I signed up with a travel agency. I have never been happier.

I enjoy traveling because it's a challenge — there is no getting bored. Moving into new situations and meeting new people is fun and rewarding. Traveling technologists serve the patient, the physicians, the facility, the agency, and — not least of all — themselves. It is a great business for those who enjoy helping others.

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