

ASPR FEATURED GOLD CONTRIBUTOR: VISTA STAFFING SOLUTIONS

ETHICS AND ARBITRATION—PRACTICE STANDARDS IN THE LOCUM TENENS INDUSTRY

By Katie Abby, COO of VISTA Staffing Solutions, Inc.

What do you do when the temporary physician you want to hire has been presented by two different locum tenens companies? You don't have to walk away from the situation if you are using NALTO member companies. There is an avenue for resolution.

In 2001, the National Association of Locum Tenens Organizations (NALTO) was formed when a group of locum tenens companies came together to discuss issues relating to the crisis in medical liability insurance. It was from these open and productive sessions that the companies realized that as an industry group, they could work together to solve or resolve other industry issues and problems.

What started as a handful of charter members, including VISTA Staffing Solutions, is now a network of more than 25 members who see the utmost value in supporting the industry, promoting ethical standards, and providing an avenue to resolve differences between locum tenens companies that in the end, benefits clients and the physicians who work with us.

A code of ethics—commitments upfront

Everyone hopes to work with, and be, ethical companies and individuals. A firm that is a member of NALTO has agreed to maintain and promote ethical standards. The code of ethics developed by NALTO is specific to the locum tenens industry and its unique set of challenges. It sets a standard that member companies, clients, and locum tenens physicians will benefit from. These ethical practices benefit not only a company's current clients, but also those who they view as potential customers.

The NALTO code of ethics pertaining to clients covers such topics as honest representation of candidates, maintaining client confidentiality, making achievable promises, abiding by federal, state, and local laws governing hiring, and adhering to a set credentialing standard.

Anyone who has a grievance against a NALTO member can file a complaint. For a comprehensive review of the guidelines, visit the NALTO web site (www.nalto.org) or ask for a copy from any member organization.

The arbitration process

Even when locum tenens companies are abiding by the ethical standards and practices set forth by NALTO, miscommunications do occur. At the heart of arbitration is the desire to resolve differences between member companies without adversely affecting customers.

If a dispute arises between NALTO members, they are under obligation to resolve the issue between them. As mentioned earlier, an incident might materialize over which company presented a candidate first. When a dispute cannot be solved between the involved locum tenens companies, the disagreement is handled through an arbitration process. As a

self-governing body, NALTO handles these procedures through its arbitration committee.

Through the process of arbitration, the committee takes into consideration NALTO standards of practice, its code of ethics, written agreements by the involved locum tenens companies, and any prior disputes involving either involved company. This process is confidential.

NALTO has a perfect record for positive outcomes through its arbitration process. Since the inception of the organization, member companies have abided by every arbitration committee recommendation.

How do you contribute?

As you use a locum tenens physician through any organization, there are guidelines to follow that will make the experience run smoothly for you. It will also assist your locum tenens company in adhering to the ethical guidelines set forth by NALTO. The following guidelines are based on NALTO recommendations to make your locum tenens experience run as flawlessly as possible.

- Work only with locum tenens companies with whom you have a signed contract. Make sure covered contract items include types of fees, amounts of fees, and terms of payment.
- Thoroughly discuss excluded candidates before the initiation of a locum tenens search.
- Accept the CV of a physician only after asking for it and giving your permission to the locum tenens company to send it. Do not accept blanket faxes of CVs for multiple physicians if you have not asked for them or do not have a current assignment available.
- Accept the verbal presentation of a candidate only if guaranteed to receive the physician's CV within 24 hours.
- Keep meticulous records of the physicians presented, which locum tenens company presents them, and the date and time presented.
- Work only with NALTO member companies.

As a NALTO member, VISTA Staffing Solutions is committed to upholding high standards of practice and providing an ethical environment for its employees, clients, and the physicians who work with us. We champion NALTO's commitment to building an industry based on open communication, respect for clients and physicians, and an ultimate focus on quality patient care.

Katie Abby is the COO of VISTA Staffing Solutions, www.vistastaff.com, a Gold Contributor to ASPR. VISTA Staffing Solutions is a member of NALTO, www.nalto.org, where Ms. Abby is on the ethics and arbitration committees. ❖