

Let's Get Practical about Evaluating a Practice

Searching for a job and finding potential practice opportunities is one thing, but making decisions about what practice to pursue is another. This can be a stressful phase of your transition into practice journey. The following are strategies to help you with this important step in your career.

Prepare in Advance

To be able to evaluate a practice, you will want to prepare ahead of time by determining what elements are "must-haves" and what are "nice-to-haves" (or optional). By doing this you can create your **ideal practice scenario**.

Ask yourself:

- What are the key elements you require to meet your personal needs?
- What are you looking for in your professional practice?

For more information, refer to the [Finding Your Ideal Practice](#) module in HFO's *Transition into Practice Toolkit (TiPS)*. HFO Regional Advisors are also available to discuss your ideal practice scenario and suggest considerations.

Additionally, talk to colleagues and supervisors to learn about potential practice settings for your specialty. The more prepared you are, the more confident you will feel during the negotiation and evaluation phase.

What and When to Ask

The job-search steps will vary depending on your specialty, location, and whether you are looking for a hospital position or an office-based practice. In general, there are details you can discuss early in the process and ones that are more appropriate to talk about when you have received an offer or are close to an agreement.

A lot of information will likely be shared with you during a tour, interview, or an informal "meet-and-greet," and at this stage it's great to ask questions about the following:

- Clinical responsibilities
- Practice population



- Call responsibilities
- Scheduling details
- Human Resources – staffing, interprofessional team members
- Practice environment and culture – space, administration
- Non-clinical responsibilities – teaching, committees
- Community characteristics – spousal employment, activities, real estate.

Tips to gather information early on:

- Talk to various team members and meet all of the physicians with whom you would be working. Ask individuals who are currently working or have worked at the practice about their experience and what is negotiable and what isn't.

Let's Get Practical about Evaluating a Practice cont'd...

- Prepare questions in advance about your “must-haves” and “nice-to-haves” so you can compare the responses to your ideal practice profile.
- Refer to the [*Joule Practice Management Curriculum*](#) and use the [*Practice Comparison Grid*](#) to organize details about the practices you are considering.

Initially it's best to focus on the core aspects of the job and avoid initiating conversations about compensation and contract details. Only discuss contract details when you are close to an offer or have received one; these details may include:

- Funding – compensation, incentives
- Contract – governance, exit clause, terms, dates
- Practice management – billing, administration, overhead

Tips for contracts:

- Get advice from your lawyer and accountant regarding the contract.
- Consider indirect compensation items, including: vacation time, call schedules, shift schedules, OR schedules, CME time and/or costs, overhead (staffing, office space, insurance, professional fees, legal costs, etc.).
- Be professional and respectful throughout the process. You want a fair agreement but be mindful of what is reasonable to ask for when you are new to a team.

Before You Sign

- Compare at least two different options: Try to compare at least two opportunities; it helps if you can arrange the site visits within a short time of each other (same trip or day) so your memories are fresh. Use the [*Joule Practice Comparison Grid*](#) (noted above) and compare to your ideal practice profile.
- Seek professional advice: Document any agreements in writing; before you sign read the agreement(s) and ask for professional advice (lawyer, accountant, and financial advisor) so you understand exactly what you are signing.
- Listen to your instincts: Look for clues that will give you a sense of the culture. For example, when you arrive, are they prepared and expecting you? Do the staff/other physicians seem happy to speak with you? Is the environment clean and organized? Can you picture yourself working there in two, five, or 10 years? Do you feel like you are settling?
- Locum: Locum to try out a practice you are considering as a permanent option.

Make a Decision for the Right Reasons

Focus on finding the right fit for you and let that guide you when deciding on your practice. Money isn't everything; it's important, but it's only one aspect of your practice.

- Look for a community in which you will love living and working.
- Find the people who will be great colleagues.
- Seek an organization that has a positive and supportive culture.
- Trust your gut!

If the arrangement is something you feel good about, then it's the “best deal” for you.

Reference:

[*Joule Practice Management Curriculum – Practice Management Checklists*](#)



An interview with Dr. Janina Mailloux, a family medicine physician in Lucan, Ontario

We recently met with Dr. Janina Mailloux who completed residency training in family medicine at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry in London, Ontario, to learn about her transition into practice.

How did you decide where to set up practice?

Location was an important factor. My husband works at an accounting firm in downtown London, and we both have family in the area so we didn't want to move too far away. After extensive searching on HFOJobs.ca, I found Lucan was in need of a physician and I felt the location would be an excellent fit for me (20-minute drive from London). I met a member of the city council and the owner of the medical building at Western's annual family medicine retreat and was able to ask them questions and arrange a clinic visit. While at the clinic, I learned more about the patient population and day-to-day operations. Lucan was also a high-need community, which played heavily into my decision to practise in the area. Ultimately, I took my time to make sure I found the right fit for me and my family, and I would advise anyone looking to join a practice do the same.

What was most challenging about setting up your practice?

The most challenging part of setting up my practice was all the paperwork/ phone calls with the ministry regarding Lucan becoming a Family Health Organization (FHO). I worked with the HFO Regional Advisor and the office manager to navigate this process, which included finding two other family physicians with which to start the FHO. Otherwise, it's been smooth sailing thanks to the lovely support staff in the clinic who made the transition to practice painless.

What was most rewarding about setting up your practice?

The most rewarding part has been the patients. Lucan is such a lovely community, and they have made me feel so welcome, which I greatly appreciate!

What do you wish you had known before starting independent practice?

The first one-to-three months can be quite overwhelming; there will be a lot of "meet-and-greets," and they can be quite complex at times (i.e. patients with many medical issues, reviewing old chart notes, etc.) However, it does get better with time once you get to know your patients.

What are your long-term goals for your practice?

My long-term goals include developing educational resources for patients, and possibly including palliative care or inpatient care in my practice.

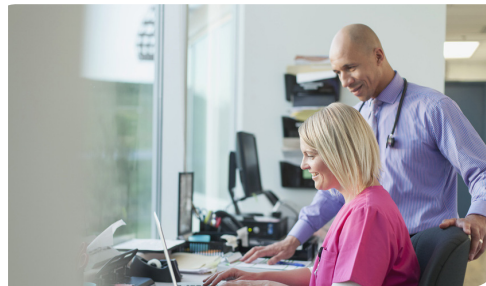


Dr. Mailloux's experience offers some key insights for future graduates:

- Consider searching a geographical area instead of a specific city/town. HFOJobs.ca offers a map function that simplifies the search.
- Know your ideal scope of practice and practice setting.
- Paperwork is required. HFO's [Practice Ontario](#) program offers information and support to assist you.
- Give yourself time. You're establishing a new way of working as well as potentially moving to a new location, which can be a big lifestyle adjustment.

Resources for Family Medicine Locums in Rural and Northern Communities

If you are planning to locum in rural and Northern Ontario, HFO has some helpful resources to support your experience.



Guide for Family Medicine Locums in a Rural or Northern Community

Locuming in rural and Northern Ontario can be a rewarding experience with unique benefits. [This checklist](#) will help you stay organized and have a positive locum experience.

Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) Rural Medicine Initiative Network

The [Rural Medicine Initiative Network](#), within the OCFP's Collaborative Mentoring Networks, is supporting rural physicians who address and manage a wide range of health-care needs in their communities, including providing emergency care. Areas of focus for the OCFP Rural Medicine Initiative Network include interprofessional education, development of a rural mentoring network, and support for locum development and retention.

The work of the mentoring network is now underway with the initial focus on the North East, North West and South West LHINs. If you are a physician in one of these regions and are interested in becoming a mentee, please complete the [mentee intake survey](#).

Resources for Locuming in Francophone Communities

Réseau du mieux-être francophone du Nord de l'Ontario supports engagement in providing quality French language health care services for Francophones by providing tools, training, and workshops to help with the planning of French-language services. [Learn more about Réseau resources for health providers.](#)

Rural Family Medicine Locum Program (RFMLP) Program Resources

[Rural Family Medicine Locum Program \(RFMLP\)](#) supports locums in rural and Northern Ontario locum by reimbursing training cost to support Family Physicians' ability to gain hospital privileges and to provide culturally safe care in Indigenous communities. Course fees are eligible for reimbursement if participating in at least one RFMLP approved locum assignment within 6 months of course date.

- [Advanced Cardiac Life Support \(ACLS\) Training](#)
- [Advanced Trauma Life Support \(ATLS\) Training](#)
- [Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety Program](#)

eConsult Guide for Locum Practice Physicians

[eConsult](#) is a secure web-based tool that allows physicians or nurse practitioners timely access to specialist advice for all patients, often eliminating the need for an in-person specialist visit. eConsult provides a valuable resource to physicians practicing in rural and remote locations in Ontario, particularly in settings where patients experience barriers to access.

Available in accessible format upon request: www.healthforceontario.ca/acs