

What if going to the same facility each day just isn't your cup of tea? Do you need a flexible schedule because you're raising children, caring for an elderly relative or are pursuing a different goal like an advanced degree or certification? Do you like to explore the country or the world while supporting yourself?

If that sounds like you, then employment that allows mobility or flexibility might be the answer. Consider an on-call or as needed position, a temporary or part-time placement at home or in a different city, or even a job driving a mobile imaging van.

Taking it to the Street

Before moving to the U.K., Charles Ansong, A.A.S., R.T.(R), spent almost two years as a full-time mobile radiographer in New York City, serving patients in nursing homes, homeless shelters and other nonhospital settings from 2014 to 2016. He enjoyed the freedom of working alone, the daily challenges and the out-of-the box thinking required at every turn. He also enjoyed the challenges and rewards of using portable machines to obtain diagnostic quality images on sick, noncompliant or physically challenged patients.

"You have to be fair and firm with your patients and communicate exactly what you're doing and how you want them to cooperate. It once took me 30 minutes to take a simple hand x-ray because I needed to talk to the patient and put her at ease," he said. "My machine weighed a lot, too. It required muscle to balance and wheel it around."



Adam Nowack, B.S., R.T.(R)(T), a full-time radiation therapist and radiographer at the University of Missouri Hospital, has worked every other weekend for two years as a mobile x-ray technologist to save up for his dream house.

“It’s a whole different ballgame going mobile,” he said. “I’m on call the whole time and start by picking up the van with the equipment, then I drive to exams anywhere within a one-hour radius.”

Adam visits nursing homes and private and state-run inpatient medical facilities, rolling his x-ray machine through the halls to take images. “This is definitely a job for someone who likes to work on their own with little supervision,” he said. “You’ve got to find your orders, check in with the facility staff, find the patient or room, and position the patient with little or no help. If you don’t have experience or confidence, it can be hard, but once you get the experience, it can be fun.”

For those interested in mobile x-ray, Adam suggests shadowing a mobile technologist for a shift. “The pay is good, and for me, the lack of structure is nice. Also, there are no office politics and when I’m driving to exams I can listen to a podcast or the radio, or talk on the phone.”

Flexibility First

James Greiner, R.T.(N), CNMT, needs flexibility in his work schedule to care for his children. As a nuclear medicine technologist for Memorial Hospital of Jacksonville, Florida, he works PRN, or pro re nata, a Latin phrase meaning as needed. He covers anywhere from two to 30 hours a week, mainly on weekends and weekday evenings for co-workers who are on vacation, sick or on leave.

In some settings, PRN and per diem (Latin for per day) are used interchangeably. The term locum tenens, meaning to hold a place, can also be used to designate professionals who fill in on a temporary basis. This happens when a health care employer faces temporary staffing demands, such as when ski resort destinations hire medical professionals only during the winter months because they expect an influx of patients.

The latest research from Staffing Industry Analysts, a staffing and workforce solutions consultancy, estimates that 48 million people took on limited duration work in the U.S.

across all industries in 2017, with 31 percent (14.8 million) performing so called gig work, whether sourced directly or through a staffing agency. According to data from the American Staffing Association, 9 percent of temporary professionals work in health

care, significantly fewer than industrial (35 percent) and engineering/IT (13 percent) organizations employ.

“For my lifestyle, PRN works,” James said. “I take care of the house and the kids. The downside is fluctuating hours and shifts — I get paid only when I work, and there are no benefits.” James has health care as he’s a retired Navy nuclear power plant operator. His wife is a nurse who works full time, with vision and dental coverage for the family through her job.

Individuals who work PRN sometimes have to work more than one PRN gig to support themselves. And although James didn’t use his PRN position to get a foot in the door to snag a full-time job, many technologists do.

“Sometimes I see a full-time job opening and talk with my wife. Would I want to give up flexibility for a steadier, bigger paycheck? Not right now. When the kids are out of the house, the decision will be easier,” he said.

Have Skills, Will Travel

Lou Buhat, R.T.(R), spent seven years doing 13-week assignments and traveling the country before he settled in Reno in 2006. Lou said he found jobs through six different placement agencies, visited all 50 states and even found romance in Alaska.

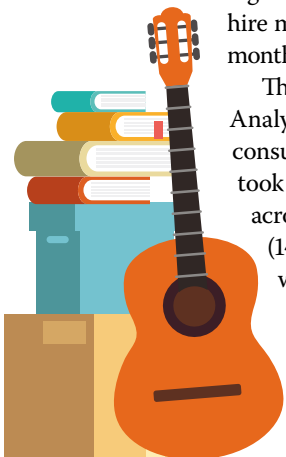
Prior to traveling, Lou was a staff technologist at a hospital in Florida for more than two years. He was primarily performing exams on elderly patients and didn’t like the repetitive nature of the job. In the late 90s, he met a traveling technologist and became enamored with the idea of traveling. Lou decided to try it.

“I figured if I didn’t like traveling after a year, I’d come back,” he said. “It was the best career decision I ever made.”

Over those seven traveling years, Lou took assignments all over the country. He moved from Florida to California, from Massachusetts to New York and then back to Washington. He met his girlfriend, also a technologist, when he took a job in Alaska. The couple decided to head south to work and travel together before they settled in Reno for a more permanent work and living arrangement.

Travelers are typically employees of an agency. They receive health care benefits, housing, car and living allowances (some of which are tax free), and the agency takes taxes out of traveler’s weekly paychecks. Many agencies will reimburse or pay directly for travelers to become licensed in states that require licensure.

Travelers do need to maintain a permanent address for tax purposes, and Lou recommends hiring an accountant or tax service to help with that. He added that



scrutinizing every contract detail is important. Travelers must negotiate everything from salary to which shifts and days they'll work. A good attitude, commitment to professionalism and sense of adventure are key elements in being a successful traveler, Lou said.

"Being a traveler is a great way to find a full-time job, which I did through someone I met as a traveler. I wanted to live in a place I truly loved, with skiing, boating, camping and outdoor activities within an hour's drive," he said. "When my girlfriend and I found permanent jobs in Reno, we stayed. We finally found our paradise."

The drawbacks to traveling, at least for Lou, were minor: having to constantly make new friends, learn protocols and adapt to different work environments and computer systems.

"I like to meet new people, learn and experience new things," Lou said. "That's all okay with me, and if I didn't like the situation, I just finished my contract and moved on. Knowing that a bad situation is not permanent was a great coping mechanism."

Sometimes, Lou said, he still misses the freedom of being able to pack up and move on to another job and another adventure. However, he said he's glad to be settled in a place and job he loves (Find Lou's tips for travelers on Page 15.)

Flexibility + Stability = FlexForce Tech

In 2018, Siemens Healthineers announced a new initiative. The FlexForce Tech program places licensed, fully vetted, Siemens Healthineers-trained technologists in facilities that use Siemens Healthineers equipment. These "super users" provide medical imaging services and train staff.

The program was created as a response to health care needs, said Angela Reeves, B.S., R.T.(R), product manager at Siemens Healthineers and ASRT Foundation Board member.

"We have an aging population and more people who need health care. ... FlexForce Tech addresses this need, then goes above and beyond for our customers to deliver the highest-level value," she said.

Having worked as a traveling interventional and cardiac catheterization technologist before joining Siemens Healthineers, Angela is familiar with the value that programs like FlexForce Tech can bring to a facility. Angela said she became a traveler to learn different ways of doing her job and to see the country.

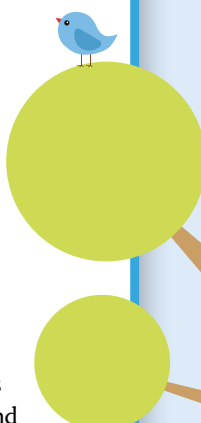
"That experience made me a better professional because I encountered situations with patients with limited range of motion," she said. "I learned alternative ways to complete the procedure."

In the FlexForce Tech program, technologists gain skills that are desirable in the job market, Angela said. In addition, the technologists train on state-of-the-art medical imaging equipment and learn about topics sometimes not covered in a radiography curriculum, including communication skills, conflict resolution and working with multiple generations.

The program length is one to three weeks. FlexForce Techs are placed in cities around the country and complete an average six-month stint. Some work in or near their hometowns, while others choose to travel the country.

The kind of person suited for the program has three to five years of clinical experience, is comfortable in multiple clinical settings, demonstrates high professional standards, is open to remote assignments and has good communication skills, Angela said.

Another recently introduced Siemens Healthineers program, FlexForce Coach, trains experienced clinical education specialists as performance consultants. These consultants work with health care organizations to standardize and optimize imaging care protocols and to ensure that every technologist on every work shift at every location is fully trained on Siemens Healthineers equipment and advanced applications.

FlexForce Coach consultants seek to understand the baseline of technologists' competencies while identifying the organization's objectives for the imaging program. They put together and deliver an educational program plan to ensure the plan is on track for the organization's objectives. 

ASRT Resources

As an ASRT member, you have access to a host of job resources. The ASRT JobBank®, asrt.org/jobbank, for example, is a good resource for R.T.s looking for job listings in their areas and in other locations. You can also post your résumé on JobBank. Job seekers can get advice for writing résumés, collecting references and connect with career coaches. The ASRT Communities also has discussion threads where technologists can ask one another questions and share firsthand information about jobs all over the country. Of course, connecting with the local affiliate society in your area or in the state you'd like to work is an ideal way to learn more, make connections and hit the ground running.