

Interim and On-Demand Clinical Leaders from WittKieffer: FAQs

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Organizations across healthcare and academic medicine turn to interim and on-demand (i.e., project-specific) clinical executives to meet urgent and strategic leadership needs. It's quick, easy, and cost-effective to employ interim leadership, including physician and nurse executives. The following are frequently asked questions we hear from client organizations about employing physician and nurse leaders in an interim capacity.

For a broader picture on interim and on-demand executives, visit the [Interim Leadership](#) page of our website.

What kinds of organizations are using interim clinical executives, and why?

We partner with a wide range of organizations, including leading health systems, independent and rural hospitals, and academic medical centers which have one thing in common—an immediate need for experienced clinical leadership.

- **Common interim roles** we support include Chief Medical Officer, Chief Physician Executive, Chief Quality Officer, Department Chairs, Chiefs of Various Medical Specializations, Residency Program Director, and even Medical School Dean.
- **Common “on-demand” (i.e., project- or task-specific) roles** include clinical leadership to support, for example, a technology implementation, quality/safety audit, medical school accreditation or curriculum redesign, or major operational initiative.

CASE STUDY

Chief Medical Information Officer

Academic Medical Center

An AMC requires an experienced **interim CMIO** to lead its Epic EMR conversion. The interim CMIO leverages prior experience across multiple Epic conversions to create calm and stability, protecting the go live timeline. Change management and strong communication skills help create buy in across clinical teams and administration, ensuring alignment and a seamless implementation.

What can interim and on-demand clinical leaders address?

While they address numerous challenges and opportunities, we see three prominent areas of impact:

1. **Leading operational and transformation projects.** The interim physician leader provides essential bandwidth to support clinical execution, stability, and coverage during leadership transitions, while driving key change-management and process-improvement initiatives such as EMR optimization and clinical documentation improvement (CDI). Interim physician leaders can also help community hospitals address strategic workforce needs by guiding the development of new GME residency programs.
2. **Strengthening the medical staff.** This includes improving alignment between administration and physicians or addressing interdepartmental friction, especially across hospital-based services and internal competition.
3. **Enhancing culture and communication.** An interim can foster effective communication with physicians, nurses, and other caregivers to support strategic initiatives as well as increase buy-in and utilization across systems.

CASE STUDY

Residency Program Director – Family Medicine Community Health System

An independent hospital in Louisiana engages an **interim Family Medicine Program Director** to help launch its second Residency Program. The GME leader manages the ACGME application process, consults on the design and development of the program, advises on the search for a permanent hire, and ensures continuity across GME with the institution's new DIO.

How quickly can I get an interim or on-demand clinical executive in place?

Within days. We have a robust database of available clinical leaders as well as a comprehensive national network of contacts to quickly identify the right leader for a client's exact needs. For a major health system in the Southeastern U.S., we provided the client with five highly qualified candidates for an interim Chief Medical Officer role within two days. For an academic health system in Louisiana, we identified the right interim Family Medicine Residency Program Director in just three business days. With all client queries, we understand that time is of the essence.

Can you place interim leaders for specialized positions requiring a specific clinical background or expertise?

Our team is adept at sourcing candidates for any clinical role, even within smaller specializations or technical niches. In addition to leveraging our vast database, our Interim Leadership team partners with more than 80 healthcare and academic medicine [executive search consultants](#) in our firm to help identify proven leaders available for interim roles.

What experience do interim physician executives typically have?

WittKieffer's interim leaders are highly experienced clinicians and executives with prior success within top-flight hospitals, health systems, and academic medical centers. Our firm has a curated talent network and rigorous vetting process. We enable our clients to move forward with confidence that every candidate has been thoroughly vetted – mitigating risk and accelerating access to impactful leadership. These leaders come from a variety of backgrounds. Many are career consultants who have worked on numerous projects. Others are often late career or retired from full-time employment yet still wish to make an impact in their professions. Interim employment affords them career flexibility as well as the ability to make a significant impact in a short time upon organizations and communities. Interim clinical leaders thrive on assessing a challenge, working with new colleagues to develop a strategy, and executing within a defined time period and budget.

CASE STUDY

Chief Medical Officer

Flagship Hospital / Health System

A regional health system appoints an **interim CMO** to provide clinical leadership and ensure continuity of care during a leadership gap. This physician executive strengthens quality and safety programs, aligns medical staff governance, and supports strategic initiatives such as service line development and population health, partnering with the leadership team to advance clinical integration, optimize physician engagement, and maintain regulatory compliance.

CASE STUDY

Chief Nursing Officer – On Demand

Regional Health System

A regional health system engages an **on-demand Nurse Advisor** to counsel the Chief Nursing Officer on defining and prioritizing transformation efforts and priority projects, catalyzing advancements in patient care delivery.

Do you place interim and on-demand leaders who maintain a clinical practice?

Our interim physician leaders focus on operational and transformational projects, and during these engagements, they do not provide direct patient care. When a client requires patient care, this would not be covered within the scope of our project. We can explore alternative consulting arrangements to support those needs. Most organizations engage our interim leaders for administrative roles or positions with only minimal clinical duties. WittKieffer does not place interim leaders in primarily clinical roles.

How long will an interim clinical leader typically serve?

Our typical interim engagement is three months. Most interim physician leaders serve at least six months, with many extending to nine or even twelve months. For project-based work, the engagement can vary based on the need for fractional or full-time support.

How long will it take them to get “up to speed”? When can I expect them to be effective?

WittKieffer’s interim clinical leaders acclimate quickly and make an immediate impact. They can “parachute in” to challenging situations and get quick wins while establishing achievable long-range goals. They are adept at driving results under strict time and budget pressures.

What is the ROI for an interim clinical leader? How do we know if our money is well spent?

There are myriad ways interim clinical leaders prove return on investment. Some returns are immediate and tangible: for example, through cost-cutting and efficiency initiatives or renegotiation of key contracts. Other returns related to strategic realignment, improving organizational and team culture, or strengthening clinical quality and safety metrics are hard to quantify yet no less dramatic in impact. We work with our clients and their interim or on-demand leader to establish a plan of action that ensures maximum financial and strategic benefit.

CASE STUDY

Chief Clinical Officer

Teaching Hospital

A teaching hospital engages an **interim Chief Clinical Officer** to provide leadership during the search for a permanent hire, ensuring seamless continuity in clinical operations and upholding the highest standards of patient care throughout the transition period.

If the interim leader does an outstanding job, can we retain them permanently?

Absolutely. It is not uncommon for clients to be so pleased with an interim leader's impact that they wish to bring them on as a member of their team. When this aligns with the candidate's interest, clients may convert the interim leader to their own employment. A conversion fee applies, and this fee is reduced when WittKieffer is also conducting the executive search for the same role.

While some interim and on-demand leaders "convert" to full-time roles, we encourage organizations to see an interim or on-demand clinical leader as an invaluable immediate resource who bridges skill and capacity when urgently needed, including in anticipation of future leadership hires. We work with clients to establish expectations and objectives for the leader to make as great an impact as possible in the finite time they are engaged.

CASE STUDY

Chief of Pathology

Flagship Hospital

To resolve diagnostic delays, a Level I Trauma Center installs an **interim Chief of Pathology Operations** who centers the turnaround on laboratory optimization and leadership alignment; redesigning specimen workflows for high-volume trauma cases, the program reduces processing bottlenecks and accelerates turnaround times. The interim leader strengthens physician leadership through collaborative governance models and introduces staffing strategies to build a resilient pathology workforce.

Would you like to learn more? Please reach out to:

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ABOUT WITTKIEFFER

WittKieffer is the premier executive search and leadership advisory firm developing impactful leadership teams for organisations that improve quality of life. We work exclusively with organisations in healthcare, science, and education – the Quality of Life Ecosystem – and provide essential knowledge, analysis, and perspective that produce effective leaders and inclusive cultures. Through our executive search, interim leadership, and leadership advisory solutions, we strengthen organisations that make the world better. WittKieffer is proud to be 100 percent employee-owned.

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through Impactful Leadership**