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Pursuing a Lifelong Dream as a Locum Tenens

Dr. Caudle:

If you could drop everything and open up your own practice anywhere in the world, where would you go? Would you stay nearby, or would you travel across the country? Or maybe even the world to help patients in need of care? For one physician, becoming a locum tenens was the first step on the way to achieving that dream. Coming to you from the ReachMD Studios in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, this is Spotlight on Locum Tenens. I'm your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and joining me to share his experiences as a locum tenens is Dr. Stanley Green. Dr. Green, thanks for being here today.

Dr. Green:

Oh, thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Caudle:

Absolutely. Well, I'm really excited to have you share your experiences with us. So, why don't we start by hearing a little bit more about your clinical background, Dr. Green.

Dr. Green:

Okay. Well, I was trained at Temple University in medical school, and afterwards, I took a residency at St. Luke's Bethlehem in Northeastern Pennsylvania. After serving as Chief Resident there, I was ready for some new adventures and the right time – company came by to suggest locum tenens and I've been doing locum tenens since the end of residency in 2016.

Dr. Caudle:

That's excellent. And what was your journey like before becoming a locum tenens physician? Did you ever see yourself settling down at one job?

Dr. Green:

I did only see examples of more traditional jobs from a lot of my colleagues and from a lot of the attendings that trained me. I didn't even know that locums was a possibility. At the end of my residency, at the end of my year as Chief, I was feeling pretty burnt out. I had interviewed at several places that looked attractive, but I felt hesitant to sign my name to a contract after feeling so burnt out by the experience of administrating as a Chief Resident, so I decided that maybe I wanted to take a look around and see what else was available – see what different hospitals and different healthcare organizations had to offer. So, I jumped to the ability to have less of a long-term contracted position, but more a position that would allow me to sample different hospitals and different environments in different parts of the country, and after a few months of doing that, I had expected to only do it for a half-year to a year, I found that I actually really enjoyed the lifestyle and decided to keep going.

Dr. Caudle:

That's excellent. And, you know, obviously traveling is a big part of locum tenens work, so where has it taken you over the years?

Dr. Green:

So, I have actually been traveling between Pennsylvania and Ohio exclusively. I only currently have medical licenses there. My wife and I, after residency, moved to Florida, where we still live currently, and since then, I've been commuting for usually 7-9 day shifts in different locations in Pennsylvania and Ohio. But, much of my locums' experiences has actually been at the same hospitals. The current assignment that I'm on has me traveling between our home in Sarasota, Florida, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I've been traveling to this hospital for a little more than a year and a half now. The other, sort of, freedom that locums gives me is I work a schedule that I determine. I feel best doing 7 days on, 7 days off, with some occasional variation, but with the kind of schedule that I work, it frees me

and my wife up to travel to different parts of the country on our weeks off. So, we have seen a good number of states, instead of going back to Florida to spend time there, we go to different parts of the country to visit friends and family sometimes on weeks off, which is a great freedom and has become a good benefit for us in this position.

Dr. Caudle:

That's excellent. And besides traveling, what would you say are some of the biggest benefits that you've enjoyed?

Dr. Green:

I've had the opportunity to work with a great number of colleagues that have expanded my own clinical practice, my own understanding. I've been able to see patients in multiple different settings from rural to intercity. I've gotten to know nursing staff and specialists and subspecialists that have expanded my knowledge, but I've also been able to do all of that with the freedom to know that if at any point a particular assignment is not to my liking, I have the freedom to go elsewhere. I've been very lucky that all of my assignments have been very pleasant and I've actually had several job offers to stay on as a permanent hire at quite a few of these organizations that I've worked for, but I've liked the freedom that locums has afforded me, and so at least until I finish paying off my loans, I think that I will stay with locums. That's another benefit that locums has afforded me. As a family medicine trained physician, I was looking at some of the salary packages that would be available to me coming out of residency, and I found that locums, often times, the amount of money that I could make in a year was sometimes 30 to 40 to sometimes even 50% more than some of the salaries that my family medicine colleagues were earning.

Dr. Caudle:

Wow. That's amazing. And we really appreciate you sharing those insights because I think that's very valuable and helpful for us to know.

For those of you who are just tuning in, you're listening to Spotlight on Locum Tenens on Reach MD. I'm your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and today I'm speaking with Dr. Stanley Green. So, now that we know a bit more about your experience as a locum tenens physician, Dr. Green, I'd like you to give us the big picture here. What are some of your career goals, and how has becoming a locum tenens played a role in that?

Dr. Green:

When I initially started as a locums physician, it was just to try and see what was out there. Since then, I found that I actually do like the lifestyle and, like I said, I'm still in the midst of paying down my student debt. My eventual goal – my wife and I's goal is to do nonprofit work in resource-poor settings. I am originally from South Africa and I have a real heart to go back to South Africa or other places in sub-Saharan Africa which have a lack of adequate medical care. Initially, my thought was that I would stay in locums to pay off my loans, and once I was liberated from my loans, I'd be free to go wherever I wanted in the world to practice medicine without the burden of having to pay back all this money. Now that I'm in locums, I realize that this may actually facilitate the work that I do going forward because locums is so flexible and because my wife's family is here and my parents and my brother are here, you know, we would never want to go somewhere permanently without the possibility of coming back to visit family here in the states. So, locums, we're hoping, will afford us to be able to go do work in resource-poor settings, return for several months at a time to earn money as a locums physician here in the states, or elsewhere in the world because locums opportunities are available in many different places, and keep sort of a 2 or 3 place lifestyle, you know, traveling between our resource-poor setting where I can do work perhaps gratis, pro bono, and coming and refilling the coffers, as it were, doing locums work for several months at a time.

Dr. Caudle:

That's really excellent. And that's so inspiring, honestly. It's so nice to hear what your long-term goals are and how you want to get back, and also how locums work is helping to facilitate that. So, such a worthwhile, inspiring goal. Before we close, Dr. Green, are there any other things that you would like to share with our audience today about that or other things?

Dr. Green:

Certainly, the lifestyle of locums has been amazing for my wife and I. It's not for everybody, but for folks who are still trying to sort out what the next step is, either wanting – are starting a career, considering a career change, or just wanting to maybe earn some extra money with extra free time they might have in their work schedule, I think it's a worthwhile thing to at least look into. Like I said, I didn't know anything about locums prior to the end of residency, and I think that it's something that especially new doctors who are coming out into the work force and are considering what is out there – locums will afford you an opportunity to earn some extra money to pay off your loans, but it will also put you in different environments where you can learn what kind of a job environment would work best for you. So, I think that it's a worthwhile opportunity for many doctors who are considering what their options are.

Dr. Caudle:

Well, that's really excellent. Well, with those closing thoughts, I'd like to thank my guest, Dr. Stanley Green, for joining me to share his

career goals and his story as a locum tenens physician. It was great speaking with you today, Dr. Green.

Dr. Green:

Well, thank you. Thank you, so much, for giving me an opportunity to tell a little bit of my story. I hope you have a great day.

Dr. Caudle:

Thank you. I'm Dr. Jennifer Caudle and to access this episode and others in this series, please visit ReachMD.com/locumtenens. Thanks for listening.