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A Journey Right from Residency: Insights on Locum Tenens

### Announcer:

You're Listening to *Spotlight On Locum Tenens* on ReachMD in partnership with Locumstory.com.

### Dr. Turck:

Welcome to Spotlight on Locum Tenens on ReachMD. I'm Dr. Charles Turck, and joining me today to share his experience becoming a locum tenens physician right out of residency is Dr. Trevor Cabrera, a Board-Certified pediatrician who trained in Houston, Texas. Dr. Cabrera, thanks for being here today.

### Dr. Cabrera:

Hi, Dr. Turck, thank you so much for having me.

### Dr. Turck:

So let's just dive right in, Dr. Cabrera. How did you first become interested in locum tenens work?

### Dr. Cabrera:

So that's a really good question. So, I think through medical school, and even the beginning part of residency, I had never heard of locum tenens. In my program, so I trained in Houston, I actually don't currently live there anymore, because I do this professionally, full time. When I was an intern, or maybe a second-year resident, we had grand rounds or some sort of talk. And I remember an agent coming from one of these locum tenens agencies and telling us about this whole field of basically substitute doctoring. I'd never heard of it, it sounded just like moonlighting. And I asked around, and nobody that I knew in my entire program was actually very aware of it. And so I started kind of looking into it, and decided this was going to be a much different kind of experience for me.

### Dr. Turck:

And why did you decide to pursue locum tenens work right out of residency?

### Dr. Cabrera:

So for me, right out of residency, there were a couple of reasons of doing locum tenens work. But I think the biggest thing is I saw, to sum it up in a couple of words, would be first of all freedom. I was able to have my own schedule, I was able to look for experience in the small areas and get out of the safety net, and really see the world. I wanted that adventure and didn't really know where I wanted to live after training in Houston, and wanted to just figure out if there's a better place for me to go. And on top of that, of course, I think a big reason was, frankly, compensation. I really wanted to work on paying off my loans. And I'm set right now to pay off all my student loans in about two and a half years after finishing residency.

### Dr. Turck:

So, what was your experience your first assignment like? Were there any unexpected challenges you faced, especially as someone coming right out of residency? And if so, how did you overcome them?

### Dr. Cabrera:

And that's a funny story, actually. So, jumping into the job market in 2020 was very difficult, I think for everyone given COVID-19. And so for myself doing pediatric locums, the pediatric market in general didn't have a lot of work. And so the one job that I was able to find was in Huntsville, Texas about an hour and a half north of Houston, where I basically worked as a newborn nursery pediatrician, attending deliveries. And I remember I showed up for my first day, not only was it my first day doing a locum tenens job, but it was my first day being an attending anywhere. And I remember showing up the first day and I was confused, and they were confused. And I got thrown right in. I had orientation in the morning, and then I started as an attending in the afternoon. And it was great. The experience for

me was that I felt actually very welcomed. I remember that when the job started, I was given one shift, and I

had no job stability after that. I was offered one shift in, I believe it was July 27<sup>th</sup>, or something like that, and was hoping I'd get more work after that. Because with the all the lack of jobs, I was basically unemployed otherwise.

So, I showed up for the first shift. I did nothing. I was on call and didn't get called in for anything. I was really confused, and I went home. And I remember calling my mom and saying this is silly. What am I doing here? What is this locum tenens thing? And then they liked me, they kept calling me back, and luckily, I stayed employed really going to just that job as the only thing to keep me in business for around eight months.

One of the things you asked about as far as challenges is I had to find ways to diversify myself. Like I said, I lived paycheck to paycheck for months really hoping that the market would recover. And it ended up recovering going into 2021. But until that point, I basically tried to figure out ways I could keep doing locums. And a lot of that had to do with money management and being pretty thrifty. But I also used that experience to really boost myself up and jump from one rung on the ladder to the next.

**Dr. Turck:**

For those just tuning in, you're listening to *Spotlight on Locum Tenens* on ReachMD. I'm Dr. Charles Turck, and today I'm speaking with Dr. Trevor Cabrera about his early career and stages of practice as a locum tenens physician.

So, Dr. Cabrera, if we look beyond residency, how has your experience with locum tenens changed from when you took your first assignment?

**Dr. Cabrera:**

So, it has been basically a whirlwind. I will say, like I said, because of the fact it was hard to find work at the beginning in 2020, I found myself springing from one job to the next. The best way to put it was that in August through December of 2020, I didn't know if I was going to have work in one or two weeks out from whatever date it was. Now we're looking at 2022, and I'm booked for the next six months. So, the job market has started to recover. But the biggest things are, I really just started to understand a little bit more of the world of locum tenens I've started to understand that I do this because I love it. I do this because it's something that helps me to grow, like I said, and meet all these people and see the country.

And the biggest thing I'd say is the connections I've built, the flexibility. I've gotten more flexible. I've gotten more communicative. I've developed these abilities that I didn't think I had a couple of years ago to become more comfortable outside of my skin. And those are the things that I wanted to get out of locums. And it's been really nice to see that it's going that way.

**Dr. Turck:**

Now you've said in past that you continue to work like a resident, even beyond your residency. So, can you tell us what you mean by that?

**Dr. Cabrera:**

Sure. And this is the part that I think a lot of my friends cringe at that are now out of residency as well. One of my big goals was to pay off my loans as fast as I could. I mean, full disclosure that was more than a quarter of a million. And so what I decided to do was, unlike most people that do locum tenens, I decided not to have a home base. So earlier you mentioned I'm from Houston, and that's correct, where I trained. But I sold everything that I could move a couple boxes back to my mom's house, and basically started traveling full time. In order to do that, in order to have hospitals and clients help to cover my expenses for hotels and travel, I basically will piggyback one job to the next. In 2021, I traveled 320 days, which means I average working about 23 to 25 days a month. The other five to seven days a month, well

two of those are used for traveling. So, I really don't take a lot of days off. And part of that goal, not only am I saving money on expenses, but that's how I've been able to pay off my loans so effectively.

**Dr. Turck:**

And before we close, Dr. Cabrera, do you have any advice for healthcare professionals for residents to mid-career level who are looking to pursue locum tenens work?

**Dr. Cabrera:**

I think that everybody should do locum tenens at one point in their life. One of the biggest things I did as a shameless plug during this last few years is I started my own personal blog called [TheNomadicPediatrician.com](https://TheNomadicPediatrician.com). And one of the things that I've written about and so far seen is the question of who are locum tenens providers. I've seen people that are right out of training like myself. I've seen people that went to fellowship for a little bit, decided it wasn't for them, and then decided to do locum tenens. And I've seen some that have practiced for years, 27 years in oncology or some other specialty, and decided they wanted a change in life, change in practice.

I think my advice is that people should do locum tenens work to see more of the country, to help with their own growth as humans and as doctors and also to realize something very important, which is we fill a niche gap that is sometimes very needed. I show up to jobs, and it used to be money driven a little bit, and it still has part of it that is financially an incentive. But I show up to jobs to relieve people of work. There's doctors out there that work 360 days a year. And so I show up so they can go on vacation. I've gone to places where they don't have a pediatrician in the desert in New Mexico, and I fill a gap and I fill a need, where the - the kids in that area just don't have a doctor. So, there's a lot of gratifying things about it.

I think that anybody that's looking to pursue it should just be open minded, be very flexible, and communicate. And those are some big tenets that I've seen fall through with locum tenens that haven't worked out. And some things that I personally believe have made me a little bit more successful. It's a nice thing to do. It's basically like moonlighting. And I think if I can say just one big thing about it is that when I walk into a locum tenens job, I'm aware that I might be temporary. But I'm very vigilant and very critical on the fact that I think about what I will leave there when I do walk out the door at the end of the assignment. And sometimes that can have a big impact even on a small area.

So, I like to think that we're changing lives the way that we all set out to do things as doctors, but particularly, this is a really interesting, personally underground kind of part of medicine that needs people to do it.

**Dr. Turck:**

Well with those pieces of advice in mind, I want to thank Dr. Trevor Cabrera for joining us to share his insights. Dr. Cabrera, it was great speaking with you today.

**Dr. Cabrera:**

Thank you so much. It was great speaking to you too.

**Announcer:**

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