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Exploring Medical Missions & A OB-GYN's Journey Around the World

Announcer:

Welcome to *Spotlight on Locum Tenens* on ReachMD, sponsored by CHG Healthcare. Here's your host, Dr. Charles Turck.

Dr. Turck:

This is *Spotlight on Locum Tenens*, and I'm Dr. Charles Turck. Joining me to share stories and experiences gleaned from a remarkable career serving in medical missions across the world is Dr. Rachael Consoli, an OB/GYN surgeon and hospitalist based at North Shore Medical Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Consoli, welcome to the program.

Dr. Consoli:

Thank you very much. I'm glad to be here.

Dr. Turck:

Let's learn a little bit more about your background to start, Dr. Consoli, because as I understand it, medical missions and missionary work in general were a part of your life even before becoming a doctor, is that right?

Dr. Consoli:

Yes, absolutely. I would say that humanitarian medical volunteer work has been part of my entire life. My father is a physician, and he and our entire family of five children at that time, now we're eight, but in those days, we were five children, we went to the Dominican Republic, and we worked there. My father and our family worked there for a total of 15 years. And between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, doing volunteer work, humanitarian work there. So it was very comfortable for me to do that type of work. And then after becoming a physician, actually even in medical school, even in residency, I would take months to go different places and any type of program that existed, I wanted to join. And then since I've become a physician, a specialist, I have traveled throughout the whole world. And I can happily say that I've delivered a baby on every continent except Antarctica, because the penguins do not need an OB/GYN.

Dr. Turck:

And what drew you to continue that journey of global public service with a focus on medicine, and OB/GYN in particular?

Dr. Consoli:

Well, it's just for me, it's a very fulfilling experience for sure. When we go to a place, especially as an OB/GYN, I usually go to places that have high maternal mortality rates and have no OB/GYN ever, you know, there. So, it's a very challenging experience. I use all my mental capacity, my physical capacity. And then very simple things helped decrease the maternal mortality rate, such as an ultrasound or being able to do a C-section. And it has really attracted me because I feel it's so fulfilling, number one. And number two, I feel like I learned so much from other cultures, other birthing practices, other tribes, the way people are treating each other, community spirit. It really has helped me on my journey as a human.

Dr. Turck:

Looking over some of your work history, it almost seems like there aren't many areas of the world where you haven't delivered healthcare services by now. But would you give us an overview of where your work has taken you to date?

Dr. Consoli:

Sure, absolutely. So, as already stated, the Caribbean, working in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. I've also worked in U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Thomas. I've also been to Belize. I've been to Guatemala, to Mexico. I've been to every country in the North, Central and South America. And Africa, I've been to most of, eastern Africa, and, Eastern Europe. I've been to Eastern Europe, and Asia. I've been

to most countries in Southeast Asia and in Asia. And so just pretty much all over the world except for Antarctica. However, you know, basic human principles are the same all over the world. The need to be loved, to love, to be respected, to respect, et cetera. And, but each culture has its own, of course, particular incredible positive aspects that are just wonderful to learn and wonderful to participate in.

Dr. Turck:

About how often now do you join missions or establish residence overseas these days?

Dr. Consoli:

I try to go at least every two years, and sometimes even every year, if it's a short-term trip. So, there's different kinds of trips, right? There's humanitarian work that's like for two weeks, and they're just desperate for an OB/GYN. They just need someone to come in and do surgeries. Also, then, of course, to decrease maternal mortality rates, that takes longer. So that's, you know, six months to one year, even two years. You know, different places that I've been, the length of stay has been varied. And that's another thing for anyone interested in doing any kind of humanitarian work is that the length of time is whatever you want it to be and whatever the place needs it to be. So, it really varies. I try to go as often as I can. I try to choose places I've never been before so I can learn something new. And that's how I decide where and how to go.

Dr. Turck:

Let's focus on some of the experiences that were most impactful for you on this career journey so far. And maybe we can start with one of your first assignments in South Sudan that you've written about, because of the care that was needed and the dangers you faced. Would you tell us about your time there?

Dr. Consoli:

Absolutely. So I was in South Sudan, for one full year, and it was from 2015 to 2016. And I was in the area of South Sudan, where the maternal mortality rate of the country which was the highest in the world at that time, is the highest, which is on the western border with the Congo and Central African Republic. And that part of South Sudan is called Western Equatoria. And it's the town that I was in was Ezo, E-Z-O. And they, because of HIV and malaria, maternal mortality rates were high. They had never had an OB/GYN there. They had never had a non-African healthcare person there. And I was the only non-African, non-South Sudanese person for 100,000 people in that Western Equatoria. And it was an incredible experience. Unfortunately, because of tribal insecurities, we had to be evacuated from that place in Ezo to another part of Western Equatoria, which was called Nzara, where some Italian nuns called Comboni nuns, they had a hospital. And so I worked at their hospital there, doing the same work decreasing maternal mortality, OB/GYN work. And it was an incredible experience.

One day, I was even kidnapped by the local rebels for one entire day. And they had to send someone to come and rescue me. And that was kind of scary. However, at the same time, I was trying to explain to them that I delivered and saved the life of the chief of their rebel group's wife with a C-section in Ezo. So they stopped wanting to hurt me when they heard that, so they were intimidated by that. However, you know, that was just that experience. However, the whole year was an incredibly fulfilling experience. And it was an incredible time both you know, both personally and professionally.

Dr. Turck:

For those just joining us, this is *Spotlight on Locum Tenens* on ReachMD. I'm Dr. Charles Turck, and I'm joined by Dr. Rachael Consoli, who's talking about her experiences delivering OB/GYN care with medical missions across the world.

Coming back to just after your experience in South Sudan, what pushed you past the dangers and related fears to jump back in and pursue more medical missions, Dr. Consoli?

Dr. Consoli:

Well, I mean, I understand where people are coming from in the sense that it's not personal towards me, kidnapping me or anything like that. They're trying to make a statement. And I understand that. And anyways, I also am there for the women and children, you know, pregnant women, and these were not pregnant women that kidnapped me, these were rebels.

And in any country, actually, you know, those who really are the most in need of healthcare and good healthcare, are the women and children. And that's who suffers the most in any insecurity, in any war. So, I just knew that I was needed there. And actually, I felt very secure the whole time I was there with my village, in both villages. Both in Ezo and in Nzara, I felt very secure. I never felt like anyone would harm me or hurt me there. This was an extraordinary circumstance when we had been evacuated from Ezo to start off with. And I just feel like although it can be dangerous, I feel like the health care need is greater than that.

Dr. Turck:

Let's dig a little bit deeper into working in medical missions themselves, Dr. Consoli. What are some of the most unexpected lessons you've drawn from your time serving in various missions? And has your approach or practice changed along the way?

Dr. Consoli:

Yes. So, I feel like traveling to different countries and meeting different cultures, it makes a human being more human. In other words, we realize that the human experience throughout the world, the basic tenets of it are the same throughout the world. And I also feel like experiences that have really changed my life have been just admiring and just seeing women of the world, how hard they work every day in South Sudan as in Vietnam, as in Mongolia, as in rural China, as in even rural Alaska. Women, every day, get up and take care of their families, take care of their communities. They work so hard. And it's just been such an incredible experience for me and I feel so proud of the women of the world, just how hard they work for peace, for justice, for education of their communities and families. And for me, that has been an incredible take-home experience.

Dr. Turck:

For healthcare professionals looking to get involved in a medical mission, such as through locum tenens placement, what advice do you have for them?

Dr. Consoli:

Oh, the advice is, go for it. Don't be afraid, just do it. We have many locum tenens groups, such as Global Medical Staffing, such as CMMB, that have incredible areas in the world to place physicians and to place you in a place that you would feel comfortable, that you would feel that you're making a difference, and that you would have project and experience. Global Medical Staffing, I've been with them now for many years. And they are just so incredible. They always know that I'm looking for the most interesting or unique experience and they find it for me, and I'm so grateful to them for that. And of course, if you wanted to do, a type of locums with a volunteer group, that's also available. And I've done that most of my career as well, and especially traveling overseas. And that has also been an incredible experience. So just choose a place you want to go. Or if you see a type of project that you want to join, do it and just be not afraid and just go forth and do it. It will be the most rewarding experience of your life.

Dr. Turck:

Along with those globally conscious takeaways in mind, I want to thank my guest, Dr. Rachael Consoli, for sharing her experiences and insights, serving in medical missions across the world. Dr. Consoli, it was a pleasure learning more about your journeys and I wish you all the best on the ones yet to come. Thanks so much for joining me today.

Dr. Consoli:

Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure for me.

Announcer:

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