

Transcript Details

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Explore the World with a Career in Locum Tenens

Announcer:

This is ReachMD, and you're listening to Spotlight on Locum Tenens, provided in partnership with Locumstory.com. Here's your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle.

Dr. Caudle:

If you were given the choice to work anywhere in the world, would New Zealand be at the top of your list? Well, it was for Dr. Dalilah Restrepo, and today we're going to find out why and what her experience living abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic has been like.

Welcome to Spotlight on Locum Tenens on ReachMD. I'm your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and here with me is Dr. Dalilah Restrepo. Dr. Restrepo, welcome to the program.

Dr. Restrepo:

Thank you, Dr. Caudle. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Caudle:

Of course. Well, we're excited to hear about your experiences. So, you know, let's start at the beginning. Can you share with us a little bit about your career before you started locum tenens work?

Dr. Restrepo:

Sure. I was in private practice for many years, maybe ten, fifteen years in Manhattan in New York City and I think after that time I became Medical Director with AIDS Healthcare Foundation, and I had a very fulfilled practice. But there comes a point in your career where it almost feels like you need something more, not challenging, but maybe just different to look outside the box and maybe do something else. And I guess I had reached that point when I received an email, like many emails we all get about advertising jobs and in different places and such. And usually, they don't spark an interest but this one did, just because it seemed so outrageous and bizarre that it was just more of a joke, really, than anything. Like, 'What am I going to do in New Zealand?'. But I thought it was interesting and so I followed through and one thing led to another and I was interviewing and before you knew it, I was submitting paperwork for licenses and doing paperwork to move abroad.

Dr. Caudle:

So our second question is, how did you come to work as a locum tenens?

Dr. Restrepo:

Well, I actually started, and I was quite determined and then I stepped back because it's such a big decision and then I turned it down and then I came back to it. And so it's a huge decision but because it was such a huge thing for me, I really felt like coming in as a locum was the only way that I could do it because I had a full-time job, I had family demands, right? And so for me to like say 'I'm going to move on my own and do everything on my own and get licensed on my own', it wouldn't have been possible. So for me to come here as a locum and have the support of a locum company helping me with all of that background credentialing was huge.

And it also felt like I was supported, and I was, kind of, in a cocoon of you're coming here for a year and you basically just have to show up. Everything else was pretty much arranged and done for you; so your housing, your trips, like the airfare, your utilities, your car, everything else, your license and your medical counsel in New Zealand, all of those other things they helped you to do that. And so I felt like that was maybe the only way I could do it.

So the way that I embarked it was I'm going to take a year off and it's like, that gap year that I never took in college or, you know, my kid is grown, so it was almost like that, kind of, 'Well, ok well I have the opportunity now to do this in my life and in my professional career that I can maybe take a year off and, and go', and this felt like a very protected and kind of risk-free way of doing so. So, I think it really helped me to do it that way.

Dr. Caudle:

Well your story is so interesting. It's so inspiring, as well and I'm glad that you really went through those details because I think it's really going to help a lot of us who are practicing physicians and thinking about what the options are. It's also interesting that you went for a year. That's a decent commitment. What was your experience working in New Zealand, how's it different?

Dr. Restrepo:

It is a commitment, but I really don't think that you can do anything less. It takes, like, three months just to grab your bearings, so really, by the time you're, kind of, getting into the groove of things, it's six months. So it really goes very fast.

So I came here March of 2019 and I was supposed to be here until March of 2020 and then go back to New York because New York will always be there, they said, right? And so, I felt like, 'Oh what could happen? Oh c'mon', right? I mean, the way that we all thought. And it was incredible. It's incredible, also from an infectious disease standpoint to practice somewhere else. It's different bugs. It's different antibiograms. Like, it's just, for me, it's very interesting. There's a lot of zoonosis here because I live in an area with a lot of farmland and a big vet school, and so it was completely different than practicing in Manhattan, totally.

And so even just from a professional perspective, which many thought you might be burying yourself because you're leaving your practice for a year, it actually was quite enhancing to see how things are done somewhere else, totally different and totally in another climate, everything was different. So I think I learned quite a bit and I think it only enriched me, professionally, really, even if I'm going back to Manhattan to practice. I think I will bring back many things that I've learned here. So I think doing these gigantic moves, even though it's scary, it changes you and it usually will change you for the better because you will learn things that you would've never learned otherwise.

So it was very interesting to me, everything, the Māori culture, learning all sorts of different things, new language, right, I mean, I didn't learn the language, but even just working with people of other cultural backgrounds. I had a wonderful experience. Life in New Zealand is absolutely "sweet as" as they say. Quality of life is very important here. The country is spectacularly beautiful. So even your days off and your weekends off you have these road trips to places that you just can't even believe that you're there, right. So it's really a stunning place, so I found it a beautiful experience all throughout.

Dr. Caudle:

Did you feel like you were experiencing some burnout before you went, and if so, do you think locum tenens helped, kind of, either overcome or prevent burnout? And do you think it could help others if they might find themselves in the same situation?

Dr. Restrepo:

Oh, absolutely. Sometimes it's hard to see clarity when you're in the middle of the forest, and for me, I was trying to figure out OK, like 'Where next?' And it's not that you're not happy where you are, it's just that if you're that, kind of, personality where you're always looking for where more can I go from here, sometimes you need to step a little back and have some clarity, and that, to me was this year. And I couldn't figure it out and everything looked the same as what I was doing or what I had done, and I just needed to step away a bit. And like I said, yes it's a year, but it's a defined period of time where I thought 'OK, I mean, I could probably do anything for a year. And how bad can it be? I mean, how bad can it possibly be?' It's still New Zealand; I mean, you're not going to, I don't know where, Antarctica or somewhere where no one's around, like you're still in a city and in a country so I felt like a year is something that I would need for clarity and to really get a sense of where I want to go next when I return to the states.

Dr. Caudle:

For those of you who are just tuning in, you're listening to Spotlight on Locum Tenens on ReachMD. I'm your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and today I'm speaking with Dr. Dalilah Restrepo about her experience working as a locum tenens.

So, let's go a little bit to the COVID-19 pandemic. You mentioned before how you said, 'Well, you know, what could happen in a year?', and of course, COVID-19 happens in a year. Looking back, what were some helpful strategies that helped New Zealand get to a place of better control? What were you all doing over there?

Dr. Restrepo:

So I was supposed to leave March of 2020 and of course, we had no idea what was coming, but it didn't look good and being the only infectious disease doctor where I am in the district health board, it was a duty really to stay and do as much as I could. And what the New Zealand response has been, it's been a responsive unity of the whole country working together for a common good and against a

common enemy. So I think that unity is really what has been the main legacy in how they've done so well. They have put lives over anything else as far as importance and priority and I think that it shows in their response and it has worked.

So public health, here like everywhere else in the world was under-funded and it's not that they had everything sorted out, it's just that their priorities when everything hit were lives over anything, first and foremost. And so, they had to step up and ramp up the programs and public health and everything else. But they did a great job and any little move that they made the team of 5 million did it together. So I think that really is what was so striking. So I lived a completely different COVID reality compared to my colleagues in the states, yes, totally different.

Dr. Caudle:

And lastly, Dr. Restrepo, your insights have been really interesting and very helpful; you talked a little bit about how practicing in a different country enhanced your knowledge, even as an infectious disease physician. Can you expand a little bit more about how living and practicing in a different country has affected your views on infectious disease?

Dr. Restrepo:

Yes. Specifically, the idea is really, kind of, learning different bacteria, different bugs, different infections, and different areas, right? But also, just in general, seeing how other people practice. The hierarchy in the hospital is different; here you're working more like under the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the way that they train is different, as well. There's just more ways to skin a cat than just what you learned. And so you take one step out and it's not just the American system-type of way. You can learn other things and they will always enhance you, and you come back with a whole new set of ideas and perceptions of how things could be.

And so I think it's extremely important if you have the opportunity, and not everybody has the opportunity, obviously and you don't have to, but if you have the opportunity and you're debating whether to do locum, I think it just it opens your mind totally. I would certainly recommend it, hands down, to anyone at any point in their career for sure. But even at a seasoned time in your career, it is not too late, and it's not like you leave and you can't come back or none of that. I mean, there you just have a lot of fears usually in your life, but it really doesn't have to be so scary. It really is enriching, so I highly recommend it.

Dr. Caudle:

Wow. That's excellent. And again, just such a very interesting story and your experiences are fascinating. We so appreciate you, Dr. Dalilah Restrepo, for being so open, sharing your story with all of us. And I think inspiring those who are listening.

Dr. Restrepo, it was really great having you on the program.

Dr. Restrepo:

Thank you for having me.

Announcer:

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