

Choosing Locums

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the country, yet enjoying the differences I experience from region to region.

Nearly seven years ago after a surprise divorce (you know the drill, husband comes home after 16 years of marriage, announces “he’s not happy,” and leaves you and the kids for a much younger woman at the office...) I found myself thinking about what “I” wanted for the first time in many years.

Life just seemed to be going at a frenetic pace and it was all I could do to keep my head above water. Then my marriage dissolved and I was in crisis management mode for both myself and the kids for some time. Eventually the fog cleared. I began to realize that being on my own was much better for both myself and the children than constantly being in an environment where a critical, unsupportive spouse/father was making the home an unhappy place. For the first time in years I had the brain space to begin the process of wondering what I wanted, and was at a complete loss.

I found myself floating mentally back to my residency days, the last time I was a “me,” not a “we.” After completing my emergency medicine residency, I didn’t really know what kind of practice I wanted to have: big city or small town, academic or community medicine. I thought I would do locums for a while, try out some different practice models and see what I liked. After a one year locums stint in Hawaii, I took a job at a small free-standing facility in the Lake Tahoe area. There I met my husband, got married, and started down the family track. The locums plan was terminated. We moved around the country and we both changed jobs several times, but we seemed pretty settled in the small town in the northwest we had landed in.

So after nine years in the same small town, the spark of an idea began to form. The children were in middle and high school, I would be an Empty Nester before long. Could I go back to my dream of all those years ago and do some locum tenens work? As it turns out, the answer is a resounding “yes.”

My oldest two girls have actually been in college for several years. About a year and a half



ago there was a custody change, it was time for my youngest who was a boy to spend more time with his dad and for the first time I was able to carve out some blocks of time to work Locums in addition to my usual shifts at the hospital where I’d been working. Despite their promise of “we do the paperwork for you,” there is a lot that you need to do when you’re engaging in locums work. I found a facility in the Midwest that was an easy plane ride from my nearby airport and spent about one week a month there. It was a great income supplement and a good toe in the water for what it’s like to be the locums in the emergency department.

My youngest graduated in June and now with three children in college I started full-time work this past summer sticking with the higher paying jobs for obvious reasons. It can be very hectic and the paperwork is never ending. You can spend months credentialing at a facility and by the time you get privileges they no longer need locums. This has happened to me several times.

The frustrations of doing locums in my mind are really kind of offset by the experience. It’s fun working at a place and when administration tells you this is the way things are, being able to say that this is not the way they have to be. (For example, delays in ambulance transport limited equipment at small facilities etc.) You learn what typical is and what’s reasonable and what’s not. For the most part the nurses and support staff are glad you’re there and work hard. There isn’t nearly as much testing and torturing the new locums as I thought there would be. I’ve discovered I like traveling, but I don’t like long drives from the airport. Scribes make all the difference in the world for me, and having worked facilities with great scribe support, I think I’ll be reluctant to go back to doing every bit of my own charting.

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One of the surprise benefits of locums is how inspiring it is to my children. They're all in college and wondering what their next step is going to be. It's a scary time. They tell me that seeing me embrace this adventure at this point in my life is inspiring to them. Instead of going home for Christmas, I'm actually flying them out to where I'm going to be traveling. I'll have a couple of days off when we will all engage in some fun new adventures (like a hot air balloon ride around Christmas Eve) with them at a place they've never been to, create some great memories, and teach them without words that it's never too late to change gears or embrace new adventures.

So, at least for right now, I'm choosing to live a locum's life. There's no such thing as a perfect job. The decreased administrative headaches and requests to be on committees, participate in performance review, etc. are offset by the increased paperwork that's always in process for the next job you're working on. But it's a great feeling providing care at facilities, most of them fairly small ones that are desperately in need. I enjoy seeing the commonalities of communities and how similar people and diseases are all over the country, yet enjoying the differences I experience from region to region. But most importantly, as a mom, I'm proud that me embarking on this adventure might help inspire my children to embrace their own adventures as they carve through early adulthood and beyond.

You can read more from Dr. Hitchcock regarding locums work and travel in her blog by visiting www.stethoscopesuitcasemd.wordpress.com. ●

ATTEND WELLNESS AND SOCIAL EVENTS AT AAEM20!

MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2020

- Opening Reception | 5:45pm-6:45pm

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2020

- AAEM20 Wellness Fun Run/Walk | 6:00am - 7:30pm
- First-Time Attendee Meet-Up | 7:30am
- Wellness Community Accelerator Meet-Up | 6:00pm-7:00pm
- RSA/YPS Social | 6:00pm-7:00pm
- Airway at AAEM | 7:00pm - 9:30pm

Learn more at:
www.aaem.org/AAEM20

Take time to recharge at social and wellness events.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 2020

- Yoga for Early Risers | 6:30am-7:30am
- Women in EM Networking Lunch | 12:05pm-1:30pm
- DIVE into AAEM Chapter Division & Section Social Event | 6:00pm-7:30pm

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2020

- Women in EM Coffee Meet-Up | 6:00am
- AAEM Coffee Crawl | 7:00am

ONGOING

- F3 Wellness Meals – Food, Friendship, and Fun
- “The Oasis” Wellness Room