

# Travel Healthcare: When the World is Your Workplace

By Jennifer Goforth Gregory



While your to-do list at work might not include running miles on a track or perfecting a backflip on a 4-inch piece of wood known as a balance beam, the challenges of traveling frequently or being based in another location can sometimes feel as demanding as training for the Olympic Games. Employees such as travel SLPs or someone working in travel physical therapy may face the stresses of learning new routines, setting new schedules, and transitioning into an unfamiliar environment, much like U.S. Olympic athletes in the long months or years before they take the international spotlight at the games.

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## A Look From an Olympian's Point of View

As a 2018 U.S. Olympic Team hopeful, Veronica Day spends her mornings training for the Skeleton event which she describes as sliding head-first at 80 MPH down an icy track. But in the afternoon, she works as a marketing and events coordinator through the Adecco Olympic (IOC) and Paralympic (IPC) Athlete Career Program. Adecco, Soliant's parent company, has helped more than 8,000 athletes on five continents through the program by providing flexible employment opportunities near Olympic training and competition locations.

Many U.S. Olympic Team hopefuls pay for their own training expenses, hotels and event fees, which can quickly add up, and athletes typically work and travel while training. One of Day's concerns with training for the 2018 Olympic Winter Games was that it would delay

a professional career for at least a decade. "With my current job, I am learning career skills that I can use after I am done competing, by having the flexibility for training and making the money I need to train my season."

## Improving Your Skills and Knowledge as a Traveling Healthcare Professional

If you are a traveling healthcare worker, you are definitely not alone. According to the American Staffing Association, 9% of all nurses, doctors, therapists and other medical professionals are currently temporary or contract employees, often on location<sup>1</sup>. Soliant works with many of these professionals to help them find jobs that match their skills and experiences in locations around the United States. Soliant's placements cover a range of settings including hospitals, clinics, schools, and government facilities.

While you learn new skills at a traditional healthcare job, the benefits of travel nursing or other healthcare positions offer magnified growth and learning opportunities while working on temporary assignments. But, whether you are an athlete training for the Olympic Games or an ER nurse working in Hawaii, working as a traveling professional can be challenging. Through their years of helping traveling healthcare professionals, Soliant has gained valuable insight into how to ease the stress and challenges of professionals whose workplace is the world. With a little bit of planning and strategizing, you can make your life on the road a positive experience both personally and professionally.

## Keep a Home Base

A common debate that many traveling professionals that travel for work wrestle with is whether or not to keep an apartment or home while on the road. Day says that she splits her home base between Utah and her parents' home in Virginia, where she spends about two months each year when she is not training. "It is important from a mental standpoint to know that you have a place to go," says Cathy Sexton, owner of Productivity Experts.

**"Even if you won't go home very often, it will increase your productivity to know that you have a place to go if you get sick or are in-between jobs."**

The best arrangement depends on the amount of time you will be spending at your home base as well as the amount of personal belongings that you need to store. Do you want to have a place to stay while you spend time with friends and family on an occasional weekend, or do you simply need a place to store your couch? If you are choosing between several home base locations, be sure to factor travel time from the location of the majority

of your assignments. If you primarily work in hospitals located on the West Coast and base yourself in Boston, make sure to consider travel times and time zone differences when planning out your downtime.

While working on the road, Soliant pays for housing expenses in apartments, condos or private hotel rooms. In some cases, Soliant also covers the costs of utilities, such as electricity and water. Every Soliant recruiter is trained to take care of every last detail, such as in finding the right living arrangement for you.

## Get Support

Even top-tier athletes need support to perform at their best. While you most likely won't have trainers, sports psychologists and nutritionists working with you, you will have a strong team in your corner to help you with your transitions. Soliant provides support for its employees every step of the way to encourage career growth, and they work with employees to make sure that each position is a fit for their needs. Be sure to reach out to other Soliant employees for support and friendship, especially when working on the road.

## Create a Familiar Environment and Routine

All travel assignments are not created equal, meaning each new assignment brings a new experience. This is both the most exciting and most challenging part of working as a travel healthcare professional. When the excitement of a new travel assignment wears off and the homesickness starts to hit, there are many simple things you can do to bounce back. "When you arrive at a new place, make yourself at home and create a homelike environment in your apartment or hotel as soon as possible with photos and mementos," says Sexton.



“By having a familiar environment to return to each night, you will be more productive.”

To make your home-to-assignment transition even smoother, mimic your home office setup in your workplace. Use the same filing system for your paperwork so that once your assignment ends, you can simply add your newly acquired files to your existing ones with as little confusion as possible. Sometimes just knowing where the stapler is each time you reach for it and having your chair facing the same direction can make you feel more at home. Many employees also find that simply taping pictures of friends and family on the computer they are using for a few hours can give them comfort and familiarity. If your assignment doesn't provide a personal workspace, consider taping a photo to the backside of your badge or even carrying a picture in the pocket of your scrubs for that little piece of home everywhere you go.

While experiencing a new locale is one of the major benefits of working on location, there's also a thrill in finding a familiar sight. “I often tell the employees that I work with who are working on location to find a familiar spot, like a coffee shop, because most all of the locations serve the same foods and have the same décor as they do in their hometown location,” says Dr. Billie Blair, Organizational Psychologist and President of Change Strategists.

## How to Set a Good Daily Routine

When it comes to setting a new routine, Sexton also recommends keeping with your typical fitness and sleep schedule even while traveling. You can buy a temporary membership at a local gym or pack your running shoes to jog in a nearby park. Other ideas include using workout videos or keeping a set of weights in your hotel room for strength training. Keep a consistent sleep and wake cycle, when possible. Getting enough sleep is critical not only for maintaining a healthy body, but for clearing the mind as well.

## Create an Organizational System That Works for You

When you keep a schedule, it's easier to be on-schedule. Day records her sleep schedule, diet, workouts, chiropractic appointments and work meetings on a handy planner.

Make two copies of all of your important documents, such as employment papers, credit card numbers, driver's license and passports. Put both sets of documents in separate plastic protective sleeves for safekeeping. Keep one copy with you at all times and give the second copy to a trusted friend or family member who will not be working on-site with you. For extra protection, scan each of the document so you can have a digital copy to refer to when needed. While you're creating these documents, also consider writing up a packing list so you can avoid shuffling to find necessary items as you prepare for your next assignment.

For bills and payment schedules, develop a system for paying bills regardless of the state or country before you even head out on assignment. Many traveling professionals use online bill pay and online banking to ensure that their bills are paid. You can also use a cloud-based storage system, like DropBox,

to store personal documents such as budgets and reimbursement information so you can access the documents regardless of your location.

## Make the Most of Unique Opportunities

Working as a traveling nurse gives you exposure to a variety of cultures and people. "You can have a prestigious formal education, but it is honestly the informal experiences that make you a well-rounded person and professional," says Dr. Blair. "Experiences that take you out of your normal game can lead to growth that you need to be a better healthcare professional. In addition to being an asset on your resume, these experiences give you an advantage over other job seekers as they indicate in-depth knowledge about a variety of topics and a strong professional character."

Sexton recommends setting aside one day a week to explore your town in order to visit museums, take a hike or see local attractions. If you have several days off in a row, consider taking a road trip to see nearby sites and cities. Make an effort to take on projects and responsibilities that you can use in future assignments, especially those that would not be available in a traditional position. If you are working with an expert in the field, consider asking questions and get a discussion going. The insight you gain here may be invaluable. Make sure you take advantage of any seminars, conferences and classes that may not be offered elsewhere.

## Make Staying Connected With Friends and Family a Priority

One of the biggest challenges of working on the road is maintaining relationships with your friends

and family, especially if you have children at home. "It's important to keep those relationships strong and make time to communicate regularly," says Sexton. "Set a schedule for calling and catching up at a time that is convenient for everyone."

Staying in touch with friends and family helps Day stay motivated and connected. "I talk to my mom on the phone every couple of days and exchange emails with my dad," she says. "My friends and I FaceTime and use group chats all the time." Recently, she engaged in a Skype video chat with a friend who helped her put a complicated sled together.

While Skyping and emails can be great, there is no substitute for spending quality time in person. Make sure that you travel to see friends and family whenever possible. Many Soliant traveling healthcare positions offer flexible hours that make returning home for extended weekends hassle-free. Many of Soliant's school-based healthcare travelers enjoy summer-long breaks in between school sessions.

## Keep a Positive Attitude

When you love your job, tough days are easier to tolerate. One of the keys to being successful as a healthcare traveler is keep a positive attitude. "I want to compete in the Olympics to represent my country at the highest level and compete on the world stage. But I also like the idea that I have to push myself because every day is a chance to see what I can do," says Day. "Sometimes a workout goes poorly, or you fail to meet a goal, but each day you come back out and try again to win." With this mentality, and with the help of Soliant, healthcare travelers can find fulfilling assignments wherever they may be.

<sup>1</sup>ASA Staffing Employee Survey. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://americanstaffing.net/sector-profiles/>