

## *Moonlighting*

By Jim McLaughlin

Since the word's initial use in America in the mid 50's, it has been defined as *"engaging in a second job after a primary job is finished"*. Nowhere is moonlighting more necessary, lucrative and high-profile than in the medical field. Moonlighting physicians can be found everywhere from cruise ships to urgent care centers to house staff positions.

Though younger physicians dominate the field, moonlighting is not the province of younger physicians-in-training alone. Full-time moonlighters, retirees, sunlighters (those working while taking paid time off from a position) are becoming more common as the primary care shortfall widens and work restrictions on younger physicians grow.

The majority of house staff moonlighters consists of young physicians in residency and fellowship programs. Over the past ten years AMA statistics indicate that up to 35% of all residents moonlight, while the American Osteopathic Association estimates that up to 75% of residents in osteopathic programs moonlight. For internal medicine residents, figures indicate that the number is closer to 50%.

To gain some insight into the local marketplace, a former and two current moonlighters offered their perspectives regarding this expanding field: Joe Zavatsky, M.D.; Alison Alexander, M.D., and Amir Siadatan, M.D.

Dr. Zavatsky, now a spine surgeon with the Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans, took up moonlighting due to financial pressure he felt while training at Albert Einstein Hospital in Philadelphia. He recalls his moonlighting days as "a great learning experience if you find the right position." Dr. Zavatsky always opted for surgical positions, but he recalled getting "slammed" a few times when he agreed to cover a medical floor.

Though he doubled his resident's pay moonlighting and learned a great deal, Dr. Zavatsky has some advice for moonlighting residents. "Be sure to find a good fit for your training and schedule; reduce your hours if you get overly tired, and put your training first. Don't jeopardize a residency for short-term gains," stressed Dr. Zavatsky. "If you work in the right setting, it's a great way to build competence and confidence," he added.

On the other hand a growing number of seasoned physicians are making moonlighting a career and a pathway to making a very good living. Dr. Alison Alexander is such a physician. "When I moved to Philadelphia I didn't know the lay of the land. By working as an independent contractor/locum tenens I got to meet many people, experience different practice models, and decide what best met my interests." After working several positions on her own, Dr. Alexander decided to work solely through B.F. Healthcare in Fort Washington, PA. "I like B.F. Healthcare's local emphasis and the way they qualify opportunities. They did a great job finding the right fit for me," said Dr. Alexander.

Dr. Alexander warns that you need to be a good businessperson if you work independently, "It can be very hard when contracts change or end. You need to maintain your availability when the market fluctuates." Dr. Alexander is currently working various shifts at Jeanes Hospital, Einstein-Elkins Park, and Einstein-Main Campus through B.F. Healthcare. This schedule is tailored to her needs and lifestyle.

Another full-time moonlighter is Dr. Amir Siadatan. Dr. Siadatan currently works in critical care medicine at Bryn Mawr Hospital; cardiovascular medicine at Elkins Park, and as a house physician at Moss Rehabilitation Hospital in Elkins Park. Early in his career Dr. Siadatan developed a unique viewpoint, "Just like electricity is a constant need to run a hospital, physician presence in the hospital is also a constant need. I learned that if you're into working off-hours, a very good living can be made."

Dr. Siadatan enjoys being his own boss, self-directing his schedule, arranging time off, and carefully assessing contracts he will accept. Over the past few years Dr. Siadatan has noticed a marked increase in the demand for his services. "The 80-hour work limit on residents along with restrictions on International Medical Graduates working outside their training facilities have created a great demand for services like mine. I know some full-time moonlighters whose income has doubled over the past three or four years," said Dr. Siadatan.

All three physicians agreed that acceptance by medical staff colleagues could be a challenge and a key to finding a good fit. Dr. Zavatsky described seeking out the Vice President of Medical Affairs for assistance at one assignment. He felt the Director of Nursing and a medical staff member were not treating with the respect due a staff physician. With the aid of BF Healthcare staff these issues

were addressed quickly and Dr. Zavatsky believes he did earn the staff's respect and admiration over time.

Dr. Alexander and Dr. Siadatan were of one mind when it came to acceptance by colleagues. "To be successful as a career moonlighter you need to be very competent, confident, and have a good personality", said Dr. Siadatan. Dr. Alexander added another point, "If I contracted as a solo physician, I had little idea how I would be treated and received. If I am working through an established staffing firm, I feel like I benefit from that established working relationship and firm's reputation."

Although these are just a few of the stories, the desire to craft a better lifestyle with controlled hours and generate a good income while practicing hospital medicine is creating a new niche in physician practice. And the future certainly looks bright for those who choose this pathway.

Mr. McLaughlin is a Recruiting Consultant with BF Healthcare – for more details contact him at (610) 742-1400 or by email at [Jimsju70@aol.com](mailto:Jimsju70@aol.com)