



## Some advice

For those who are considering practice opportunities south of the border, we offer some advice from our own experience.

- Establish criteria for where you will or won't move. We eliminated earthquake zones, places as cold or colder than Calgary, excessively popular sunbelt locations, city-states like New York, communities with warehouses advertising "Guns-Guns-Guns" and cities whose schools had poor scores on standardized state exams.
- Arrange for the recruiting agency or hospital to pay all travelling expenses up front — this can avoid months of turnaround time in receiving payment.
- Insist that your children be included on the visit to a new location. When you announce that "we have decided on location X," this previous visit will let them begin to make their own psychological adjustments.
- Reject offers to stay at plush hotels, and instead request bed-and-breakfast lodgings. There, your hosts can provide a true picture of the medical and social community you are considering. We eliminated one "promising opportunity" after discovering that the hospital had failed to live up to commitments made to an earlier recruit. We learned this from our bed-and-breakfast hosts and had it confirmed by the doctor.
- Refer all questions concerning a contract to your lawyer, and ensure that all legal expenses and immigration costs will be paid by the contracting hospital. Remember to have the recruiting institution cover moving expenses (\$10 000 from Alberta to Wisconsin) and relocation costs.
- Accept that immigration procedures will be costly, time consuming and fraught with delay. A move from Canada to the US on a temporary visa will take 6–9 months. Unless your receiving hospital can legitimately claim that it is an underserved region, where the waiting period for visas will sharply decline, you can count on completing huge amounts of paperwork.
- Do not sell your house until you get your exit visa.

a previous article I wrote for *CMAJ* (*Can Med Assoc J* 1995;153:1633-5), I have received calls from physicians wanting to hire me to negotiate their applications to emigrate to the US. Some of the doctors who call us have never travelled further from Calgary than Banff or Vancouver. Now, they are making plans to leave their country.

A move to the United States involves every kind of anxiety: financial, emotional and, as the stress escalates, physical. The waiting-for-the-visa game also takes a toll, and the cost is not purely financial.

To ease our transition, we have decided to take some proactive steps. We will open an Internet account in order to lower the cost of what will inevitably be homesick calls to friends and relatives. We have decided to take our first summer vacation in Canada. The children will attend their favourite Rocky Mountain summer camp and visit friends and relatives. We hope they will learn that international borders, while fixed by treaty, are not the barriers they used to be. Communication breakthroughs like the World Wide Web are guaranteeing that.

In the final analysis, we *all* decided, after much weeping and gnashing of

teeth, that we did not have enough incentive to stay in our home and native land. We have kids to send to college, orthodontists to pay, retirement savings plans to begin.

Yes, Virginia, we have called the moving truck. But we are comforting our daughters with a line from a favourite book, which we repeat whenever the I-can't-believe-we're-doing-this feeling overtakes us.

Readers of the *Little House on the Prairie* series will undoubtedly recognize the biography of Laura Ingalls Wilder. The story begins like this: "For Laura, it all began in the Big Woods of Wisconsin. . . ." ?