

Blog

Life After the Military: How I Transitioned Back to Civilian Medicine

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EmCare recognizes and salutes the contributions of physician-veterans today and every day.



By Ricky Thomas, M.D.

Men and women across the United States selflessly choose to serve our country every day. Often, the call to serve comes during the formative high school years, or after a significant historical event. I chose to join the U.S. Army at the age of 54.

Joining the military had always been a goal, but my life took me in another direction first. I became a husband, father and physician, running successful family medicine practices in Illinois and North Carolina for 25 years. Yet, despite this success, I still yearned to serve my country in a more formal capacity. So in 2008, I enlisted in the Army as a physician, joining at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. I served four years of active duty, with missions to Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, followed by a year with the Army Reserves.

During my service, our troops thankfully weren't under fire; my work mostly involved helping develop clinics to treat the Iraqi people as a humanitarian effort. As a civilian, I had participated in eight medical missions to Zimbabwe, Soweto and Cape Town, South Africa, and as an ordained minister, I've helped people in all walks of life. This time, though, it was inspiring to be part of something bigger.

Military service is something I share with two of my five children; one son served in the Air Force, and another is active in the Army. I'm proud of our family's commitment to this country.

A medical diagnosis unfortunately cut my military career short in 2013. That's when I met EmCare recruiter David Guffey, who matched me with a moonlighting opportunity. David is retired from the U.S. Army too, and specializes in recruiting clinicians with military experience. Working with David, it was easy for me to transition from military life to civilian because EmCare is military-friendly. It recognizes the unique experience and qualifications that military physicians can bring to the practice, and recruiters work with veterans and active military to find opportunities that enable them to use those leadership skills.

When I left military service I made a change on two fronts: from military to civilian, and from family medicine to emergency medicine. However, all of my

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clinical experience prepared me well for this next phase in my life. My time in the Army made me appreciate hierarchy, authority and the chain of command. It gave me leadership experience, and helped me develop mechanisms for dealing with off-hours shift work and positively managing my body's Circadian rhythms. My civilian career allowed me to work with a variety of modalities and specialists, including advanced practice providers.

I'm now medical director of the emergency department at Christus Spohn Hospital-Kleberg in Kingsville, Texas, putting all of my varied experience to use. I'm thankful for all of the support that EmCare has given me.

EmCare's comprehensive Military Medicine Support Team helps emergency medicine, internal medicine and family medicine clinicians with military experience get credentialed and receive the required training to begin or return to a civilian clinical career. Orientation and Shadow shifts ensure that these uniquely experienced clinicians are properly prepared, and our support team will coordinate your schedule around military duty and personal life. For more information, visit [our website](#).

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