

Announcer:

In this episode of Tim Talk, our guest shares what it's like to live and work in a place with a different culture and language.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you for joining us for Tim Talk. I'm Tim Dentry, President and CEO of Northern Light Health. By now, you know that Tim Talk is a place where we embrace diversity, equity and inclusion, by creating understanding through dialogue.

Tim Dentry:

I'm fortunate to have a guest today to help us have a meaningful dialogue about international workers and what they experience. Dr. Maksim Liaukovich is an oncologist at Northern Light AR Gould Hospital. He completed his medical schooling in Belarus and subsequently completed training in Ottawa, Canada. He later moved to Brooklyn, New York, where he completed his residency and fellowship in hematology and oncology.

Tim Dentry:

His wife, who is also fulfilling her waiver position requirements is an internal medicine specialist working in Arkansas. By the way, we look forward to her joining us in the Aroostook County one day soon hopefully. Dr. Liaukovich, thank you for joining us.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Thank you so much for having me here. And I'm really happy to share my experience of being here, my first steps in the new area.

Tim Dentry:

Absolutely. That's so wonderful. We're so happy you joined us. For our discussion today, I'd like to highlight for our audience the growing importance of cross-cultural teamwork in the workplace. I know from your work experience, I am sure you have tremendous experiences along those lines. And for my listeners, when I say cross-cultural teamwork, I think of our ability to work together with colleagues of all different backgrounds and to understand people from different cultures and engage with them respectfully toward a common goal, providing the best care possible. That's what I think of, that's what we want to get your thoughts on.

Tim Dentry:

So to start the conversation, Dr. Liaukovich, here in the county, now that you're with us here in Aroostook County, great place, can you share what it has been like to adapt to a new cultural environment as well as a physical environment? And I'm especially interested in hearing about your different cultural experiences, your home in Belarus then Ottawa, then Brooklyn, and now the County, saving the best for last maybe, what that was like and how they've impacted you, how you've grown.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Yeah. That's a good, interesting question. Moving from Belarus to Canada, that was a little bit more stressful to adopt. But here, locally, what I found it reminds me my home country in a way that people

are more close to the same behavior, like I used to have back in Belarus. And I think it is more not cross cultural, but more with... it comes towards the community and the size of the community.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

I grew up in a village, in a small town, basically village, small town, and that makes a difference. People in small communities are different from large cities. That is my thought about this, how I think about this process. Moving into large city, that is a challenge. People are more individualistic in a city, they don't really think a lot about others. I cannot say, don't think a lot, but they prioritize their own life, I would say this way.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

And that is nice way to have in a city, because you have a lot of other options for yourself for help. Let's say you want to go somewhere, issues with the car, you just dial for the taxi, do Uber anywhere you want. If you're in small community, that's a different lifestyle, you depend on our others. And people realize that, and they are more proactive.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

When I came here, I was nicely surprised by this, how people are proactive. Like in my department, my manager, "Oh, weekend is coming, do you know where to go? Do you know where the market here? Do you know where the local stores?" In large city, I have to ask. Nobody will be proactive, nobody will tell me unless I ask. And that is another way to deal with a lifestyle.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

But in small communities, people are proactive. They want to see you comfortable, that is the nice place for me. I feel more comfortable here compared to Ottawa and Brooklyn. That I think the big difference and the big advantage for people like myself, who used to live in such places. I don't blame others who grew up in large cities. They like their style and they're more individualistic, and that is fine but you have to be grown in that way. That is the major advantage, what I found here. So my pathway was kind of challenging, but at the end of the day and the end of my pathway where I am now, I'm pretty much comfortable and I like this.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

I have more examples. I had an issue with my car. When I went to mechanic store, I left my car and I'm waiting. I called the taxi that I Google it. I am new, I don't know anywhere, what to do. I Googled. And I'm calling those first numbers, "Yes, we're far, we're coming." Car waiting 15 minutes, nobody's coming, half an hour, nobody's coming, an hour. And I'm standing outside on the roadside an hour, and something is wrong.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

And I see the wife of the mechanic, she's just passing by. She stopped. I did not ask to stop, I did not raise my thumb up. She just stops, "What's wrong?" People are proactive. "May I give you a lift, may I ride you home?" Like "Yeah, sure." And then that was so new for me. When you don't need to ask people help without asking, they see if you need help or not, and that is a huge difference.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

I'm so thankful for them. And I really feel more peaceful, more comfortable in such communities. The same with my neighbors, they're very helpful. They just step nearby and they just come and say, "Oh, hello. We are your neighbors. If you need something, let us know we're here. If you go somewhere, we'll take care of your property, we'll help you. And that comes because they know when they go outside, so somebody needs... to help, you don't need to ask. They come and offer, that is the difference.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

I've never talked about that in the past with my colleagues, because we're so busy, don't have time to talk about this. But that what I realized, and I actually want to share with others and just ask them, what is your experience for those who grew up in large cities? I want to just compare that's my... What I got from this kind of talk, when I was offered to talk about this cross cultural and communications. I did not think about it until I got here in Presque Isle, that's the difference.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Another colleagues also here, one of the doctors, they told, "Do we know whether they sell the best kind of like food, buy seafood here?" "I mean, no, I don't." "Okay, I'll show you." And people show, they go and they show. That's important.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

I think that kind of support, which we need, especially people like me who do not know anyone in this area. I don't have parents, I don't have siblings, I don't have my relatives in this area at all. And the only people whom I deal with, that's my coworkers basically initially, later on neighbors and that's all, and they become my relatives. I cannot rely on anyone else, and that is so helpful.

Tim Dentry:

Yeah. Well, as a seafood lover, I especially loved your last example. But you really resonated with something that's a theme of all that we're trying to do in Northern Light and that is, as you describe those situations, and that's amazing, the wife of the mechanics stopped and, as you said, took the initiative. But it was how it made you feel, what you said, what is, it made you feel comfortable, it made you feel thankful, not only that example, but all these examples that you gave. And that's what it's all about.

Tim Dentry:

It's a famous Maya Angelou quote that I have quoted on these podcasts frequently and that is, people will forget what you did, they'll forget what you said, but they'll never forget how you made them feel. And that's at the heart of our culture of caring that we're trying to make sure we nurture and build.

Tim Dentry:

And you're absolutely right, the communities and Presque Isle is this way, that everyone depends on each other and you do that proactively. The way you said that, I hadn't thought of the word proactive in people working together and staying together and hanging with each other, but that's very, very true. Without that initiative, then we miss opportunities. But no opportunities have been missed, for example, in this current 2020, 2021 COVID pandemic.

Tim Dentry:

Presque Isle, the ingenuity and creativity and can do spirit and working together, it's been a sight to behold, it's been wonderful, and it's in the example of that. And you've given very personal examples as someone coming from away just as I came from away, not as far away as you, but also multiple steps to get here. And here we are, and we love it here in Maine and here in Northern Light. So I really thank you for that.

Tim Dentry:

Now, let me ask you, what can you tell us about any new, but unfamiliar, let's say situations, different social customs or communications kinds of things? I sometimes find fun and humor in it, but sometimes people do not find it fun or humorous. It actually can be a little difficult, a little unnerving for some people. But that you have experienced, and how have you been able to address them?

Tim Dentry:

Your perception of equal treatment, treatment as an individual. You talked about Brooklyn and Ottawa as individualistic dominated and I think that's very true in so many parts of our country here in America, that's for sure. But I'm just wondering how at the same time do your end of what you come with as an individual, how has that been perceived? What are people reflecting back to you as you express your individuality?

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Here, I found the people are very nice and very polite. Sometimes, I even want them to say that I do things wrong, I mean, wrong or they don't understand what I mean. If you compare in average, everything is quite similar to what I've experienced in the past, but I'll give example what I mean.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

I'm international, I have an accent. I worked in Ottawa, I worked in Brooklyn. And if people don't understand me, they say, "He is different." Patients are so polite that even if they don't understand me, they don't say, I realize it only later on. And then when they come, they say then to the nurse nicely, "Oh, could you come with me in the room?" Something like that. After that, I started to try to speak slowly and ask, do you understand what I mean? Please tell me, do you understand? Please tell me, what do you think about that? And after that, they are fine.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

So that is something that I found here that is slightly different, but now I know how to deal with that and the patients are happy with that. They're just nice, they don't want to upset me probably, and that was challenge for me. In a nice way, I realize how nice are they that they so appreciate that we come here to help them, that they don't even want to ask additional questions. I'm working on that with my patients, so we're getting better.

Tim Dentry:

Wow. I'm working on that with my patients. And I was going to ask you how the cultural differences from which you come from as compared to most of the patients that you serve. I was going to ask you how that affects your thinking, behavior and interactions. And that's a great example, what you just said. And I'm working on that, the way you just concluded your thoughts, that's what we want everyone to do.

Tim Dentry:

That's what we want all people in Northern Light to do with colleagues, with patients that we serve out in the community, and that kind of a thing is, work on relationships, work on making sure that we're connecting as closely and deeply and not let these human made barriers get in the way or acknowledging that barriers might be there and doing something about it.

Tim Dentry:

At Northern Light culture matters. And we nurture a culture of caring that starts with caring for one another, and we embrace a culture of quality. Culture and our values bring us together around a common cause, purpose and mission. And we also know the culture, in a broader sense across our national divide here can be divisive, exclusive rather than inclusive and hurtful to people. And that's why I'm so happy to hear your reflection on how you're bringing inclusiveness and togetherness and a real positive kind of force to healthcare that we have here.

Tim Dentry:

So I'm just so happy that you're our guest today. I'm so happy that you're with us here in Presque Isle and with Northern Light. And I can't wait for you to spend many, many years here and for your wife to join us when she's finished with her obligations as well. I want to ask you one other question in a minute, but what are other thoughts? What are your reflections of what I just shared with you?

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

That is what I see, like you've told, that culture is important for us. I think culture is important for everyone, but not everyone pays attention on how to improve and help with cross cultural issues. This is the first place where I see when you, like a team, try to do something with that.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Because when I came to New York, yes, people, we get the [inaudible 00:17:45] cross cultural communication, but in real life, nobody talks about that. It just there somewhere, but maybe because people are busy. I don't know, I don't blame them. But this is probably the first place where we're trying to help with that, where we're trying to address that. And that is different, and that is important and I'm really thankful for that. As I've said, this reminds me my hometown, and that's why my wife also wants to come. And we want to be in our peaceful kind of atmosphere, that what we want to do and that is the jobs which we're looking for.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

It is not only about just serving the population, but in addition to that, we want to do that with some passion and feel that they just value that they want that, the people want that. In New York, in Brooklyn, I did not have the same feeling. I did my best, I want to help, but patients are different and people are different and I did not have such passion for that.

Tim Dentry:

Wow. Well, that's great. So that what I just heard you say, again, the way that you state this and describe how you feel, and then how concludes some of your thoughts here really have moved me, such as what you just concluded with and that is, the difference between the two settings has a huge difference on your passion that you bring to your work and to your life.

Tim Dentry:

We all need to really reflect on what is the source of our passion? Am I living passionately? And if not, what is it about life or the way I approach it, my philosophy, what have you, because there's many people, I think that face challenges to be able to live their life in that kind of a passionate, dedicated way. And to hear that if those kinds of life aspects, not just work aspects, work being part of life are just right and makes a big difference on the passion that you exude, and I'm very happy to hear you put it that way.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

We're really thankful for that and for the people who work here, who make our life easier to do our things. I'm really thankful for patients who are so nice and encouraging, and I'm really happy for that. And thank you all for having me here and allowing me to join your team. I'm really thankful.

Tim Dentry:

That's wonderful. Now that's the topic, but I did have one other question because as you and I were getting ready to record this for our listeners, we were talking about, yes, the current stage of the COVID pandemic. And you experienced the initial surge probably a year and a half ago in Brooklyn. And so, as an oncologist, you saw what the impact of COVID had on access to care and then people's disease process being more advanced by the time you saw them, and that kind of a thing.

Tim Dentry:

So just your perspective as a physician, as an oncologist and what this means so that our listeners can really learn from that and hopefully, they can share with loved ones, share with other people in the community and reflect them on themselves on, how can I make sure that I'm not taking my eye off of the care that we really need to deliver so that more advanced disease processes don't happen? Your thoughts on all that, please.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Yeah. So from my experience, in New York during first COVID wave, which happened April, May, 2020, how I see that what maybe might be done better or what we can improve, first, I want to share what happened. During the COVID wave, all resources were focused on patients with COVID. And we know that we have particular amount of resource, and we have huge rise on one condition only, which was COVID.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Other physicians, nurses, healthcare workers were kind of switched to that area, were moved to another area. But at the same time, the amount of patients with regular conditions, high blood pressure, [inaudible 00:23:18], any other condition or cancers especially, it stayed the same. And by moving core resources to take care of COVID patients, we decreased the resources for other patients and that was a huge concern.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Yes, I agree that many cases can be postponed, but in cancer, it is quite challenging. With progression of the cancer, we might not talk about curative options and we can talk only about palliation. Palliation,

that is just maintains violence for particular amount of time, month, years, but we're not talking about cure. That is huge difference.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

That's why I think we need to, from both sides, from the doctor's side... I mean, from medical side and from community side, be aware about that and do our best to prevent. What do I mean particularly? Let's say every case should be individualized. I agree that some of the cancers we can wait for a month and they should be fine, but some of them aggressive, those we still need to discuss and try to feed them with our care to do everything now, we cannot wait because that patient will live the whole normal life if we'll take care of now.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

From community side, people also needs to aware and to think not only about themselves, but about others. If you'll do vaccinations, if you'll wear mask, if you'll do social distancing, that helps. And that helps not to ourself, that helps to others. Let's say I go to the store, I wear mask, not to myself, but to protect others. That's how we need to think about that, and that should help.

Tim Dentry:

Yeah. That's great. Thank you for sharing that perspective. I thought it was perfect timing, that's for sure. So, Dr. Liaukovich, I appreciate you. I appreciate you sharing your perspectives with me and with our podcast listeners as well.

Dr. Maksim Liaukovich:

Thank you so much for having me here. And I really appreciate this talk, I really enjoyed it. And I hopefully all of us, we will learn something from that. And I hope that we'll continue to work on improvement within the hospital, within our system communication and within the community, because the final goal is to take care of community and to take care of ourselves, basically because we are the part of the community. So hopefully, that will be helpful.

Tim Dentry:

So true. And I think it is helpful, and I've enjoyed it as well. And thank you to our listeners. Until next time, I'm Tim Dentry, encouraging you to listen and act to promote our culture of caring, diversity and inclusion. It starts with caring for one another.

Announcer:

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