

SENIOR REGISTRAR POST OCT 2005 – MAR 2006 WHAT I'VE LEARNT AND WHAT DIFFERENCE IT'S MADE

The steep learning curve for senior registrar started well before I was even appointed. I had to write as proposal to present at the interview. This job was novel, as in there was no rigid "job description" instead I was free to create, and for me this is where the journey began.

I was delighted to get a place on the scheme, I don't think I fully appreciated how much I would gain from these 6 months at the start, but nevertheless I was keen to get going.

THE LEARNING SETS

I used to look forward to VTS meetings last year if I'm honest for the social factor. For the learning sets this too was true, but I also knew the topic for discussion and had strangely become an "eager beaver" having done some preparation, so I could get the best out of the sessions.

I found great strength from our group. I was fortunate enough to be training alongside other like minded ambitious young GP's; who I have to say were all truly wonderful people. I can only describe the power of the group as an infectious energy.

We were encouraged to use the group as a forum to help progress our projects, particularly via the QUISP workshop. We learnt together shared our mistakes and gleefully celebrated successes.

I cannot stress enough how different this was from VTS days, there was no role call or signing in. This was interesting learning, self motivated learning, and learning things I didn't know could be learnt! Or I guess it could be summed up as adult learning, this was demonstrated at our first learning set, when we chose our own topics as well as when we met.

MARION LYNCH SENIOR REGISTRAR COURSE ORGANISER

Marion introduced herself not as a tutor, or course organiser but as a facilitator. At first I did not know what to make of this eccentric, unpredictable woman with an affiliation to Pixar cartoons. But now I see her as an innovative, creative, and fearless visionary. She is an inspiration, a breath of fresh air, passionate about her cause, believes that the senior registrar programme turns out something other than "just a GP" I remember Marion saying very early on the "you are the leaders of general practice" and I thought "what planet is she on?". I now believe her, if someone tells you something enough times, and you see it unfold in front of your eyes it is difficult not to believe it.

MY PERSONAL PROJECT

Initially my remit for 6 months was to undertake the diploma in practical dermatology, an online distance learning course run by the University of Cardiff, this would be 2 sessions per week. To work 4 sessions within the Dermatology department at the local DGH including minor surgery, 3 sessions in general practice, and then to work with the PCT in setting up a primary care dermatology service – quite a tall order, and I wasn't sure if I'd bitten off more than I can chew!

I think it is true to say, as with most things in life, you get out what you put in.

Firstly I think I realised quickly that I had to manage my time efficiently if I was to achieve anything, I also learnt to prioritise as I had so many aspects to my project.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my clinical sessions at the hospital and I have good working relationships with all the consultants, who have been very forthcoming with their teaching and fully supportive of my project. I have been on regional study days, as well as a couple of visits to Cardiff, and I love skin. I feel privileged to be aspiring to my dream of becoming a GPwSI in dermatology, and it's so close I can almost taste it.

My time in General Practice has been more valuable, and I have enjoyed it more, perhaps as it has been limited. But I have now learnt that for me to function best as a doctor I need to be happy, i.e. have a working life that suits me. This has been reflected in the decision to work 4 days a week. Allowing me firstly to complete my diploma, and then to do work in dermatology, or perhaps with the PCT.

Informally both are interested in my services, as with most things in the NHS money will be the deciding factor.

The PCT work, initially this was the hardest, I had to do a lot of work to simply “get in”, but once I had made the right contacts, I loved the project. I visited some pilot sites, did some capacity/demand modelling and presented this to the team. For reasons out of my control (politics / redundancies / other projects taking priority) this was as far as the work went, this in itself was learning point i.e. welcome to the NHS!

I have been contacted by the PCT rather than me chasing them, I have been asked to sit on a working group for the development of dermatology and plastics in primary care. I have also advised that I am not working full time so should there be an opportunity at the PCT I would be delighted to help.

It is easier to reflect on the diploma, as I have submitted weekly MCQ's and 5-6 assignments, and have been averaging scores of 70% and above. But as a senior registrar I have come to understand that numbers don't reflect that much. I think what I am trying to say is that academic tests are great, but what I actually take away from the senior registrar programme is less tangible, but far more valuable.

I have learnt about myself, about values and attitudes. I found using Myers Briggs very useful, I now understand parts of personality that I had not previously acknowledged, and hopefully this will help me communicate better with others. Being a type A or “warrior” all change is a threat and I need to defend myself, I can now see change as an opportunity, I now also feel I have the skills and ability to lead others through change.

I have learnt to give names to feelings that I think I have always had but never been able to qualify. A self awareness, social skills, reading others – previously perhaps regarded as mumbo jumbo, but now there is recognition for this, this is emotional intelligence. Something I feel every doctor should try to attain.

WHERE AM I NOW?

I am a GP partner in a successful teaching practice and I have a special interest in Dermatology. It has taken me a long time to type that last sentence, as I still find it a little difficult to believe. I am certain what made me stand out from other candidates was that I was a senior registrar and that I was doing something different and innovative, wanting to do something to continue my professional development as well as making a difference to patients' lives. I can think outside the box, I appreciate that business in General Practice is not a dirty word, as doctors we are all driven by our patients, but the drive for success as a practice should not be shied away from.

It is an exciting prospect, that some of my hospital colleagues will never have the pleasure of dabbling in.

The group helped me to stick up for myself. I have now been offered a contract and salary that I am happy with. I have had the strength and sense to work less hours for less money, leaving me free to do what I want with my day off, I see this as an insurance against burnout.

I am very excited about PBC I have gained invaluable insight from the learning set sessions, particularly the role play. I know I already have my new partners on board for looking at dermatology services, I think after the recent White Paper this will become a reality. For me personally this is fantastic, I can see my career right where I want it.

In hindsight, the senior registrar programme has been a 6 month investment, that will reap benefits for the rest of my professional career, and I would like to thank you for the opportunity.