

Response to: "Why I am pursuing a career in general practice"

CORRESPONDENCE

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The Royal College of General Practitioners is delighted to see the article by Peter Edwards on his vocational choice of a career in general practice 'Why I am pursuing a career in general practice'. (1) It is an engaging, informative, and articulate account, of not only the concerns, but also the immense opportunities facing students and foundation doctors considering a future career in general practice.

Students and foundation doctors have the ability to shape the future of general practice, especially at a time when the profession faces significant problems in workforce and funding resources. We have a significant challenge ahead of us in attracting, engaging, and educating the future general practice workforce, but it is also accepted that a strong base in general practice will be the cornerstone of a healthy National Health Service. With an ageing population, more people with multiple morbidities, and the movement of health and social care services from secondary care to primary care, there is no better time to consider a career in general practice - you will be very fulfilled, and very busy! Indeed, Simon Stevens, the Chief Executive of NHS England, has said very clearly that the NHS cannot survive without GPs.

Students and foundation doctors as a result are under significant pressure of work and assessments, which in turn shapes their experiences and their expectations. Most medical schools still allocate relatively few weeks of clinical placement in general practice, limiting exposure to the specialty and to its role models. It is becoming increasingly evident that general practice faces severe stigma and

negativity from established medical colleagues – as Peter Edwards also relates. Such negativity has a significant impact upon the attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of students and foundation doctors towards general practice and it is vital that we address these concerns head-on.

Creating the ideal educational environment for students and foundation doctors to experience all medical specialties with an open mind and the ability to make informed and educated career decisions that are in their best interest is a significant priority for the RCGP. General practice teaching needs to be clearly signposted and embedded in the scientific principles and practice of general practice, showing students what an intellectually rich and stimulating career choice it can be. Inspiring the GPs of tomorrow will be determined by our ability to successfully nurture positive student dispositions towards the profession. It is imperative that students and foundation doctors are supported to make informed career decisions, having gained positive general practice exposure, and access to an accurate and informed picture of the current and future general practice landscape. They also need a chance to meet good role models, of whom there are plenty in general practice. A recent study of Cambridge medical students and foundation doctors found that following increased exposure to general practice there was a threefold increase in applications to general practice specialty training!

A career in general practice is intellectually and medically challenging, diverse and fulfilling. The opportunities offered by a future career in general practice have never looked more exciting and as a profession we have a duty to make sure that all aspiring medical students and foundation doctors are aware of the wealth of opportunities attributed to general practice. The RCGP will do all it can to ensure that many more, like Peter, decide that a career in general practice is for them.

As a student or foundation doctor you can become a member of the RCGP for free, with loads of great benefits – for more information email students@rcgp.org.uk or visit <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/membership> to sign-up today.

The RCGP also wishes to commend the work of *The British Student Doctor Journal* (BSDJ), in particular its student-led approach. The College through its recent Student Engagement Strategy hopes to create vibrant and engaging pupil, student, and Foundation Year - led networks, campaigns, events, and activities – ensuring our engagement activities always remain relevant and responsive to the needs and interests of pupils, students, and Foundation Year

doctors. We wish the BSDJ the very best going forward.

Kamila Hawthorne, Vice-Chair (Professional Development), RCGP

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1. Edwards, P. Why I am pursuing a career in general practice. *The British Student Doctor*. 2017;1(1):9-10.

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