

Teaching and learning in general practice



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At last month's General Practice Education and Training (GPET) annual convention in Brisbane, a colleague asked me how and why I chose general practice as a career. It was a question I'd been asked many times before, and as a current registrar in the Australian General Practice Training Program, a question I suspect I'll be asked many times yet.

My responses vary, reflecting the numerous reasons why general practice is my 'vocation of choice'. As former general practitioner, Sir Llew Edwards stated in his Opening Address at the GPET convention, that being a GP revolves around caring for and treating another human being. Our profession prides itself on its doctor-patient relationship and our role as primary care healer. The public's perception of general practice also revolves around our central role in looking after their health, as 'family doctors'.

In considering why I chose general practice, I often reflect on what I most enjoy about my work. Certainly the satisfaction I receive from caring for my patients and their families is a core theme, but being a GP in Australia involves a lot more. Sir Llew charged us to 'go beyond the normal demands of caring for our patients'.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting new basic term registrars about to commence their first day in general practice. Their orientation led me to reflect on my own first day and the factors that have assisted me to develop since – support from my supervisors, the preparation the orientation day provided, the clinical knowledge I had obtained during the years leading up to general practice, my encounters with general practice so far (including being a patient with my own GP), and the knowledge that many others had taken the same path before me and had grown into fantastic GPs in their own right.

While some aspects of Sir Llew's general practice environment remain constant, today's training system is vastly different. Medical educators, supervisors, GPET, colleges, regional training providers, and training advisers all work with the registrar to provide an environment that aims to help that registrar become the best GP they can be. Unchanged, however, is the centrality of the GP who teaches.

I can't recall much of my first day of medical school, although the one concept that remains clear to this day is the notion of the word 'doctor' deriving from the word 'teacher'. This issue of *Australian Family Physician* celebrates that core role of the GP – the GP as teacher.

A key element of learning in general practice is the acceptance of feedback from those who observe us. Moorhead describes an approach to giving feedback in practice that makes it both effective and easy to accept.

We also learn how Birks, a registrar whose life is as vertically integrated as her training, has experienced a model of vertically integrated teaching in a practice in rural South Australia. The article eloquently demonstrates how flexible teaching and learning can keep work, self, family and community in perspective.

As a current general practice registrar in the midst of my own steep learning curve, I still find opportunities to teach – my patients, colleagues and also medical students. I'm constantly awed by the work performed by the most dedicated and under recognised teachers in our country – the GP supervisors. Kramer, a rural GP who has been supervising registrars for 16 years, reflects on what it means to be a supervisor in the training program. It is interesting to read how supervisors combine the demands of being a GP with opportunities to nurture their appren-

tices and provide opportunities to teach and learn; during home visits, in the corridor, and along the footpath.

Successful completion of Australia's general practice training program requires registrars to pass The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Fellowship Examination. There are many ways in which registrars approach this exam, and Stewart et al provide us with a humorous reflection on an approach that worked for them in clearing this hurdle (with room to spare). Atkinson also provides us with an update on the practice based assessment route that is open to candidates from other pathways.

A well equipped doctor's bag is a registrar's best friend during home visits. Hiranamek et al update the recommendations for their fellow registrars assembling their first bag. This article will be useful for those entering practice, as well as for experienced GPs who would like to confirm that their 'bag of tools' is up-to-date.

This issue of *AFP* was conceived by an enthusiastic team of registrars. Whether you are entering the training program, a recent Fellow, or an experienced GP, or reminiscing on a long career, I hope this issue provides an opportunity to reflect on how our profession allows us to learn from ourselves, our peers and our communities. To teach one must first be willing to be taught.

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