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Reflecting on research

Reflecting on my first 4 months as a part time academic general practice registrar demonstrates the highs and lows of pursuing the challenges of research – particularly after being involved in full time clinical practice. Exploring research in general practice has proved an interesting and rewarding experience.

The overwhelming feeling at this early stage is just how much time research can take. Compared to the rapid pace of clinical practice – a patient every 15 minutes, 28 patients a day, 126 patients a week – the progress of research is a completely different time pressure to overcome.

In an average week I meet regularly with one of my co-supervisors, and discuss current research with other colleagues. These discussions have been really useful in developing my research ideas and learning about working in the research world. They have also shown me that research is very different to clinical general practice. 'Working in research' can mean reading about your area of interest, talking to others about their research, or simply just thinking about what it is you want to achieve and how you're going to do it. Research is not necessarily a 9 to 5 job – often you have some of your best ideas and insights when you are away from your research environment!

A number of barriers have added to the challenge of starting out in research. Some of these have been easy to overcome and others not so easy. An added complexity for me was starting the job with the knowledge that I would be taking maternity leave mid way through the term. I initially feared this would restrict what I would be able to achieve; fortunately, this has proved not to be the case. Although I have decided not to start a research project of my own, I have been able to join existing projects and assist with data collection. I feel this approach has helped me gain a broader understanding of what is required across a range of different research methods.

To overcome other barriers, I have found it best to talk to all the people around you and to follow up on contacts. The best thing about working in a

small academic department like ours is its connections with other departments in the university, with the state department of health, the Menzies Centre in Hobart, and Tasmanian Divisions of General Practice to name a few. This has enabled me to talk with others about their own experiences. For example, I found out about Cochrane courses, and spoke with people who have performed Cochrane reviews. This has given me an insight into what I would like to get out of my job and also what time frame I need to complete a Cochrane review.

This job is also challenging in the sense that there is a combination of teaching and research. It is important to get the balance right for what suits you and your interests.

In summary, you can make an academic general practice registrar job whatever you want it to be to suit your professional and personal needs. It is vital to:

- talk to others to find out what their experiences have been
- look at all your options and make up your own for your needs
- don't panic if you don't feel very busy; your thinking time is important too, and
- have fun!