

# "The best bit about general practice is the close interpersonal interactions that you experience with patients."

Chris wanted to be a doctor from the age of 13. He chose general practice due to the unique connections it offers with patients. As well as still working directly with patients, he leads teams training future GPs.

## Dr Chris Warwick

### GP

#### Employer or university

Health Education England, Kent, Surrey and Sussex

#### Salary range

Over £65K



### How I got into the role

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I wanted to be a doctor from the age of 13. I enjoyed sciences and wanted a career helping people. It might sound like a cliché?, but it was an important factor early in my career choice.

Our family GP growing up knew of my interest in medicine and invited me to go with him on home visits. It was my first experience of general practice and he inspired me to become a doctor. During sixth form I was lucky to get a work experience placement in a

local hospital. This really helped me understand the workings of the NHS.

After medical school I worked as a pre-registration house officer, which is the equivalent to Foundation training <sup>[1]</sup> today, and got some great experience in medicine and surgery. I spent six months working in A&E which I enjoyed and nearly chose it as my specialty. In the end, I chose general practice due to the unique relationships you build with patients. My most cherished gift is making people *feel* better.

After three-years of GP training, I spent six months as a salaried GP before becoming a partner in two very different practices in Surrey.

Education and training always interested me, so I then became a GP Training Programme Director for Health Education England's Kent, Surrey and Sussex (HEE KSS) team. It was my first step into medical education.

While working as a GP partner, I was gradually promoted through the deanery roles of Associate Dean, Head of GP School before moving on to my current role as the head of the primary care <sup>[2]</sup> department for HEE KSS in 2020.

## **What I do**

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When I was a GP partner, I loved having the contact with my *own* patients. It also meant getting involved in wider decision-making. GP practices are small businesses, just where patients are at the heart of everything you do.

My current job means being part of the leadership team looking after the education and training of the entire healthcare workforce across the South-East of England. It is a big responsibility but one that I relish. I love facing challenges no-one else has managed to solve!

I still value my contact with patients. I wish there was more time to do this but I am very lucky to be able to say that I love both the clinical and education elements to my work.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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The best bit about general practice is the close interpersonal interactions that you experience with patients. It's an incredible honour to see inside someone's life in such a special way.

You get the opportunity to help patients understand their own health, to explore current problems and work together on the next steps to overcome them. Patients often willingly open-up allowing a connection to be made very quickly. You really can help to make people feel better in one single interaction as a GP.

Working in education and training means I can help the careers of other healthcare professionals. This is a real privilege. I'm also very proud to be an honorary professor with the University of Kent for my work in GP education. This reflects the excellence of our amazing educators. We always look to provide the highest quality supervision and development for our learners.

Being a GP means you can also develop outside professional interests including commissioning services, education and new technologies. You'll also develop your entrepreneurial skills.

It also means living with uncertainty and balancing risk which can be a challenge. You're guiding patients through an increasingly complex web of care pathways and there are often economic considerations. You must be willing to live with imperfection.

## **Life outside work**

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Maintaining a life outside medicine is important. I became a parent in later life, and I've found I really enjoy my time with the children. Being a parent has also made me better able to negotiate, prioritise and delegate at work.

Singing has been an important part of my life since university days and I enjoy being a member of a local choir. It's great to be in a situation where I'm not responsible for making decisions and to achieve high standards for pleasure.

I also practise mindfulness and yoga, which along with the singing help me to cope with the pressures of my job.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

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I'm keeping an open mind about what might happen in the future, as I'm not done learning and developing just yet. Whatever happens, I'll always want to have contact with patients, and whatever leadership role I have needs to be focussed on allowing individuals to live their best lives and work to their absolute potential.

Top tips?

- grasp opportunities as they come along, but don't worry about missed ones, as others will also come your way
- once you become a GP it's just the start of the journey - it takes time to learn the business side and it's important to play to your strengths
- build your communication skills. It is one of the most important aspects of working in general practice as you often see around 20 patients in a half-day clinic. It's easy to miss important things if you don't know how to listen effectively.

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#### **Links**

[1] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation\\_training](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation_training) [2]  
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