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Subject: Achieving Balance Working as a Speciality Doctor

DR TRITTON, WHAT IS AN SAS DOCTOR?

I am associate specialist, which is a grade that you can choose to be in if you haven't been through the training grades, or you choose not to do consultancy. I'm an experienced doctor in paediatric oncology, but I'm not a consultant; however I can work at the level of a consultant because I've been in the job for such a long time.

AND YOU CHOSE THIS DELIBERATELY BECAUSE OF FAMILY REASONS?

I did yes. My husband is an airline pilot and when I first decided to take the role I had two small children; it was very difficult to juggle everything with my husband being away all the time and the on-call. One of the advantages of being a SAS doctor is that you can choose a post without any on-call and that's what I did.

YOU WORK A ROUTINE 9am to 5pm FOR THREE DAYS A WEEK, SO FROM THAT POINT OF VIEW IT'S A PERFECT SITUATION?

It's a perfect job and I get a lovely life outside the hospital.

SO WHATS IN IT FOR THE DEPARTMENT?

It's all about having a very experienced person on the shop floor. I've been here for 10 – 12 years. I was a registrar first then I became a staff grade and then an associate specialist - so I've been doing the job a long, long time. In and out of the department come SHOs and registrars and they don't know what they are doing. It's a very small sub speciality so they are not really expected to know what they are doing and I'm here to help them with training. The consultants have got lots of other things to do, especially in paediatric oncology where they do a lot of national work, so there's not always that support. It's great to have somebody that's experienced on the wards as, obviously, the patients can be quite sick.

WHAT SORT OF PERSON DOES THIS GRADE WORK WELL FOR?

I think it depends on why you move into it in the first place. I certainly chose it as a lifestyle choice. Other reasons to choose might be because the level of responsibility of being a consultant keeps you up at night. If so, it's a great choice because you haven't got the ultimate responsibility for the patients. You can work autonomously and you can look after the patient, but ultimately the buck doesn't stop with you. If you do feel uncomfortable about that level of responsibility it's a good career choice to make.

WHAT HAPPENDS IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND, OR IF CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE AND YOU WANT TO MOVE INTO THE JOB WITH THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY?

Yes, you can certainly do that. Whatever job you do counts towards your experience. It's much easier now because there is a set pathway to travel up the specialist registrar route; a pathway of training that everybody recognises with your CCT at the end of it. It's a little bit harder if you do it another way, but you can apply through the old article 14, or the specialist register, the seasoned route to get on to the specialist register and become a consultant. It's quite a lengthy process, but I wouldn't see it as a mistake if you move into this grade and then you want to progress your career because, as I've said, there are certainly pathways by which you can do that.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE FOR THE LIFESTYLE REASONS TO GO THIS WAY?

If you take on a role as an SAS doctor I think it's really important to make that role your own. It's not a role that will progress for you because it's a service role. You have to grasp every opportunity you can to get involved with stuff within the Trust where you work. If you want to you can just go to work, do the job and go home again; if that's what suits your way of life and lifestyle then that's fine, but if you are in a post for a long time you start to feel like you want to other things within your department or within your Trust... But as an SAS doctor it's up to you to push yourself forward, to get involved with that sort of thing. It's not necessarily something that you will be asked to do, or will be given to do. If you are a consultant you might be asked to take the audit lead or something like that, but as an SAS doctor you need to push yourself forward and say what about me - I can do that too. It's important to do that for your own career satisfaction. Just doing the role is perhaps not enough for some people. Some people get disillusioned with the role because they haven't got other strings to their bow.

I UNDERSTAND THAT AS AN SAS DOCTOR YOU DON'T GET PAID AS MUCH – IS THIS TRUE?

You are not on the same salary scale as a consultant, but that is the compromise you make. I don't do any on-call and I only work three days a week. There aren't any consultant posts like that out there. That's the choice you make. It's not all about the money anyway; it's about the job satisfaction.

I UNDERSTAND YOU ALSO ADVISE OTHER SAS DOCTORS THROUGH A ROLE AS SAS TUTOR

Yes, I am a SAS Tutor for the OUH Trust, which is a role that was devised after the government gave some money to SAS doctors across the country. That role entails looking after the continuing professional development of the SAS doctors within the Trust. What we've done over the last three years is to develop different sorts of generic training programmes, or training days for SAS doctors; not about their specialities, but about leadership or management or appraising or educational supervising so that people can get involved and a proportion of doctors have come forward and really got involved.

IN YOUR CAREER YOU HAVE MADE YOUR CHOICES; WOULD YOU DO THE SAME THING AGAIN?

Yes absolutely without a doubt. There is no way I would go up the training route and become a consultant. It just doesn't fit with my lifestyle.