

Dr. Hannah Lambert, Salaried GP
Bearsted Medical Practice

Subject: A Closer Look at General Practice

DR. LAMBERT, HANNAH; TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF.

Well my name is Hannah. I am a salaried GP in Bearsted, which is a small village in Maidstone in Kent. I qualified as a GP August this year (2009) and I have come back to my roots. I'm from Maidstone and it's really nice to live in this area again. I've recently bought a house, I'm getting married, so there's lots going on, but I'm really enjoying my job too.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A DOCTOR?

That's an interesting question. If somebody had planted the idea in my head a bit earlier, probably the answer would be yes. I was good at science at school, I think most doctors are, but nobody pushed me in that direction. I never really thought of it. I don't have any doctors in the family or anything like that, so I took a slightly different path and did a biomedical degree at Leeds University which led me to an extremely dull laboratory job, which I managed to do for a year, and then I just thought I need to talk to people a bit more. How can I use my skills in a bit more in a sociable and communicative way (*our website can support you in all of your career decisions with our suite of free career planning tools.*) I think it was around this point that somebody suggested I'd make a good doctor, or something along those lines, so I embarked on my medical career from there.

OUR WEBSITE IS THERE TO OFFER ADVICE TO PEOPLE MAKING A DECISION ABOUT THEIR MEDICAL CAREER; ABOUT CHOOSING THE CAREER THAT'S BEST FOR THEM. WHY DID YOU CHOOSE GENERAL PRACTICE?

The very special thing about general practice is that you get to practice lots of different skills a variety of specialities all in one. If people are anything like me they'll find that as they go through their early medical training they go to paediatrics and think 'oh I really like paediatrics'; then they go to obstetrics and gynaecology and think 'oh I really like that'; but to make a career choice where you get to experience all those things on - let's face it a daily basis - I think that's very special and unique to the speciality. It was this variety that specifically attracted me and also the camaraderie and the teamwork that you come across in a general practice setting. It's fabulous. You've got lots of flexibility and things like that to tempt you. It's a wonderful career. (*There is information on the personal characteristics associated to over 60 specialities on the website.*)

A LOT OF PEOPLE STUDY THE WORKFORCE STATISTICS THROUGH OUR WEBSITE. DID YOU HAVE A LOOK AT THESE YOURSELF?

I am sure I did at the time; I think the overwhelming thing from a personal point of view is that I knew 100% that I wanted to be a general practitioner so I don't think statistics would have dissuaded me one way or the other I think the one thing I would say that it is very evident to me that primary care is becoming bigger by the second and lots of secondary care services are coming into primary care (*Indications are that in the next few years nearly half of vacancies for doctors will be in general practice*); for example GPs with special interests in orthopaedics or other specialities know there are going to be more and more jobs available in general practice and I think, statistics to one side, that's the overwhelming feeling that I have and I'm glad about it.

YOUR ENTHUSIASM IS INFECTIOUS, BUT WHAT IS IT ESPECIALLY ABOUT WORK IN GENERAL PRACTICE THAT YOU ENJOY?

It's really nice to get in the morning to come in to your job and not have a clue what is about to walk through the door. It's challenging, but it's unique again to the speciality. You can have a two year old sitting in the chair one minute and literally 5 minutes later have a 102 year old with a completely different set of problems. This is part of the challenge of general practice and makes it very enjoyable, every single day is different. The other great thing is the continuity of care you are able to give to your patients. I've worked in lots of different medical jobs where you clock someone in then you never see that patient again; you have no idea what happens to them, what the outcome was. In general practice they are your patient; you have that luxury, not only of looking after them through their life, but looking after their family as well and understanding how things impact on them.

BUT IT'S NOT ALL GOOD IS IT? THERE MUST BE SOME ASPECTS OF THE JOB THAT ARE NOT SO GOOD?

I think this is so with every job. If you ask the majority of GPs, the biggest thing that gets them down is paperwork. These days it's all about forms and dictation and referrals; there's a lot of that, but you need to balance it out so, providing you are organised, you can strike quite a good balance. I think that's what most general practitioners would say. Personally the thing I most don't like about it is encountering vicious dogs on home visits because I'm really not a fan of them. It's the one thing in general practice that frightens the living daylight out of me - but I've learned to cope with it so that's good.

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A TYPICAL DAY?

Well, obviously, every day varies, but there is a basic structure to the day. We tend to start at about 8.30 and one of the great things about general practice, in this practice anyway, is that we all meet in the coffee room. Upstairs we have a big doctors' area and we will sit for half an hour and sign prescriptions together. I know that sounds very dull, but we have a lot of banter. We have started up a fat club, so we weigh each other every Friday. Also there's a lot of opportunity to interact with your colleagues and talk about difficult cases if you need to. We then do a morning surgery, 10 minutes a patient. As I said before you never know what is coming through the door. Then there's an opportunity to do home visits, which are extremely varied and very interesting. It's not many jobs when you get to go into peoples' homes and see them in that context. Then there's a bit of paperwork, of course. Then you do an afternoon surgery again 10 minutes per patient and then you are off by 6.00pm. It a full day, but it's varied and challenging and every day is different.

YOU TALKED ABOUT THE GROWTH IN PRIMARY CARE. WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO MAXIMISE THEIR CHANCES OF WORKING IN GENERAL PRACTICE IF THAT IS WHAT THEY CHOOSE TO DO?

The main thing is to have an enthusiasm for general practice and I think that can only be gleaned from experiencing it. I know that most foundation programmes now are starting to incorporate general practice placements, which I think is brilliant and I would really encourage any candidate to approach it with an open mind and see how they like it. If they decide it's for them then I think they need to be confident about their decision and enthusiastic about their decision; just let their natural personality shine through at interview or selection. Selection is really looking at your communication skills and abilities. Knowledge you can find in a book, but communications skills are very important.

WHO WOULD YOU SAY WOULD MAKE THE BEST CANDIDATE?

Somebody that loves the job; somebody that can demonstrate that they love the job; a team player. It is essential to be able to communicate with every single member of the team in both primary and secondary care in order to do the best for your patients and you do need to be organised. It's a much more autonomous way of working than in hospital and you need a degree of organisation and ability to understand what's going on a day to day basis.

IF YOU HAD YOUR TIME AGAIN WOULD YOU MAKE THE SAME DECISION?

Oh yes. 100 times over definitely.

Thank you