

FIVE MINUTES WITH IAN PAGE



DR IAN PAGE | CLINICAL HEAD OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGY, NORTHLAND DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD, AND ASMS NORTHLAND BRANCH PRESIDENT

IAN PAGE, ACTING IN THE PANTOMIME ROBIN THE HOOD, WITH GEORGIE BIDOIS.

What inspired you to become a doctor?

I was inspired by a family GP carrying out a home visit for my younger brother. I was about four at the time and living in Newcastle, and the visit made such an impression on me that I told my mum I was going to be a doctor like Dr Turner. My parents were aspiring and upwardly mobile, and nothing else leapt out at me in the same way as medicine while growing up. I was probably fairly naïve about what was involved with medicine, but I remained comfortable with the idea of becoming a doctor.

After training in London and working as a consultant in England for eight years, I moved to New Zealand in the year 2000. It was a time in my life when I could move halfway around the world, and I settled immediately in Northland, where I've stayed since.

Northland is a lovely place to live. It's warm and easy to get out into the countryside. It's a place with a lot of history. This is my home now. I was president of the local amateur theatre company for six years and I'm still on the committee. I've built the stage and set, sold the tickets, acted in productions, and I hope to get back into acting this year.

From a professional point of view it has the challenge of being relatively deprived so we are able to help people a great deal.

What do you love about your job?

Medicine is always different and interesting. The individuals you come into contact with are unique. It's people-focused and very much a team-oriented profession. I enjoy the collegiality

with others, and the opportunity to work alongside other professions.

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In gynaecology, we're doing a lot to improve the quality of life for people. It's not usually life and death as such, but it's very much about the quality of life people are having. On the obstetrics side, it's about trying to make childbirth safer and with as little intervention as possible. It's always a balance of risks and the challenge is to get that balance right.

What is the most challenging aspect of practising medicine?

Getting it right for the patient and trying to stay in tune with what your patient wants as an individual, and the wishes of their whanau. A lot of people aren't empowered to make their own decisions but there's a family approach. I found that challenging when I arrived from England. I still work hard to get my head around it, and it really highlights the importance and value of good communication.

There have been a lot of changes to the way medicine is practised. I grew up on a one-in-two roster, which would not be tolerable to most people today. So one of the broader challenges involves reshaping the provision of medicine with the changed approach of doctors in terms of how they wish to work. And it's not just the

young, new doctors - more people generally don't want to work a one-in-two roster.

It's challenging for patients, too. They have to let go of the idea of having their own doctor, especially in general practice, and accept that they're being looked after by the whole practice rather than a single GP.

Why did you decide to become a branch officer for the ASMS?

While working as a consultant in England, I was a branch secretary for the British Medical Association and had managed to resurrect the Lancashire branch of the BMA, which had become moribund. I'm a very benign unionist. I believe we should be responsible and also be militant when needed - but employers also need to be responsible.

I've always believed that things needed to be done and I've got reasonable organisational skills which could be put to good use.

"If nobody else is going to stand up and take on the task, then I'll put my hand up."

I'm always happy, though, if someone else wants to stand for a branch role.

What have you learnt from this experience so far?

It's a very slow process to see any achievement. Communication is the key for local issues. More recently, we've seen an increasing need for SMOs to resolve issues amicably within a department rather than going out and involving management. A collegial approach can be very effective, rather than a managerial approach.