



WITH CAROLYN FOWLER

CAROLYN FOWLER IS AN ANAESTHETIST AT AUCKLAND'S MIDDLEMORE HOSPITAL AND IS A MEMBER OF THE ASMS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE.

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR CAREER IN MEDICINE?

I've had a deep interest in medicine from early childhood, from when I was six or seven years old. I thought I wanted to be a nurse, but my father encouraged me to think about medicine.

I belonged to the St John's brigade throughout my teenage years. While doing my 1000 hours community service badge, I spent time in the local hospital emergency department to finish it off, and I also nurse aided in an elderly person's hospital. From the time I was about 12 or 13, I was nurse aiding in the local geriatric hospital.

I was always more interested in science subjects at school. I went to Otago University and completed a degree in science first as I wasn't able to get into medicine. I did a degree with double majors in biochemistry and physiology. After that I got into medicine. I spent my pre-clinical years at Otago and then moved to Wellington for other training, and then onto Waikato Hospital for my house officer years.

The desire to be a doctor was just inside me.

I always liked watching the medical TV dramas, but it wasn't really these that sparked my interest. I remember when my brother burnt his feet badly when I was young. We went to hospital to see him and I found it massively interesting.

I was going to get a job in radiology but then I did a senior house officer run in

anaesthetics just to fill in the rest of that year. I'd previously found anaesthesia a struggle because I didn't have enough background knowledge at that point. But then off I went as a senior house officer to do three months in anaesthetics. For the first two weeks it was a nightmare, and then I woke up one morning and everything had just fallen into place. It was like - bang! I suddenly had the big picture. After that I was just really in love with anaesthesia. My husband got a job in Auckland and so I applied for the programme there.

I spent a year at Vancouver Hospital before returning to New Zealand for a job at Middlemore Hospital in 1999. I've been there ever since, and spend some of my time working in private practice as well.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR JOB?

I love the mixture of 'doing' and 'thinking'.

The job can be very stressful but it changes so much and I love that.

One minute it can be great and the next it can be hell on earth. I love it when it goes well for patients. I like to help people. My patients are very important to me, and that underlies my practice of medicine.

WHAT IS THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF PRACTISING MEDICINE?

The public's perceptions about medicine are not always accurate, which can be challenging. People expect us to be able to fix everything. In some ways, we're a victim

of our own success. Some expectations are completely wrong! People watch stupid programmes on TV and think that nothing bad will happen to them, but of course sometimes they do.

Health is still under-resourced, which is a problem. It means we can't actually perform as well as we could if we had enough time and resources.

WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED OR LEARNT FROM YOUR ASMS INVOLVEMENT?

ASMS has been great in so many ways. On a personal level, it was massively helpful to me when it came to understanding my own employment terms and conditions. Like most SMOs, I never really read the contract so it's been good to learn what I am entitled to. I now help other people in the department understand these things. Every time someone new comes along, I can explain what they're entitled to.

In a wider sense, as a National Executive member, it has been good being able to contribute something to public health care in New Zealand by understanding the big picture and having input into these national discussions.

It's given me a real insight into what's happening elsewhere around the country. In a big city hospital you can be very protected from the realities in other, smaller places, so it's important to talk to people in other hospitals and specialties.