



DR HELEN FRITH, AN ANAESTHETIST AT COUNTIES MANUKAU DHB AND COUNTIES MANUKAU ASMS BRANCH PRESIDENT.

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR CAREER IN MEDICINE?

I wasn't really thinking of doing medicine when I was 17, but I applied and got in to the Auckland Medical School, which was only four years old, on the advice of another medical student. The first year was hard, because I had not done science subjects at school, so I had to catch up. Over the following six years, I came to love it.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR JOB?

As an anaesthetist, I am able to interact with patients and their families, albeit briefly, then take care of a person through one of their most frightening life experiences. I still really enjoy seeing the look of relief in their face when it's over.

I also enjoy the technical aspects of my job, the real-time application of altering physiology and particularly the interactions in the operating room environment with all other members of the team. There is often a lot of stress on a day-to-day basis, especially with trauma and seriously unwell patients, and having a good team relationship helps deal with the stress.

I guess I go to work for the people - both patients and co-workers.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECTS OF PRACTISING MEDICINE?

There are personal and professional challenges in practising medicine. It's often difficult to leave work problems at work and I often think about patients, make plans for the management of a difficult patient and do work emails at home. Work-life balance can be difficult, particularly for parents of young children who are also trying to work and establish their careers at the same time.

The professional challenges involve maintaining competence and confidence, and working in a resource-limited environment. I see many SMOs now in a state of learned helplessness, being able to see how patient care could be improved but not wanting to develop ideas in the face of "there is no money".

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH ASMS?

While I was the clinical head of the anaesthetic department at Middlemore

for six years, I attended most of the JCC meetings, because it was important for me to gain knowledge about the wider hospital, and indeed, national medico-political scene. The role of Branch President became available as I was finishing as head of department, so I decided to become more actively involved.

WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED OR LEARNT FROM YOUR ASMS INVOLVEMENT?

I've learned that, as SMOs, we don't work as individuals. All of our medical training is based around the individual doctor-patient relationship, which is fundamentally what we do every day. We treat patients. However, we can't do this effectively without the big "health machine" behind us.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that senior doctors often neglect their own well-being and are not particularly good advocates for themselves.

ASMS is strongly involved in these areas of SMO advocacy, both with health and well-being and the difficult, but very important, negotiation of our MECA.

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