



## LISA DAWSON, MEDICAL ONCOLOGY, WHANGAREI HOSPITAL, NORTHLAND ASMS VICE PRESIDENT

### WHAT INSPIRED YOUR CAREER IN MEDICINE?

If I'm honest I wanted to be a vet at first but I grew up in England and I didn't have high enough grades to get into vet school so I ended up doing medicine instead. My dad wanted his three daughters to have professional careers so all of us ended up in medicine for different reasons.

I kept thinking about training to be a vet and contemplated changing over several times. Then in my final year of medicine I met my Kiwi husband and we moved to New Zealand. I was still thinking about being a vet when I got here but I told myself to give it another year.

*Once I started working, I really enjoyed medicine and haven't looked back.*

I worked as a GP, but I missed hospital medicine. By the time I had six children I had left general practice and re-entered hospital medicine, getting a role as oncology MOSS in Tauranga. That's when I decided I wanted to be a medical oncologist.

So, on completing my year as a MOSS I moved with my family to Hamilton to complete basic training. After so much time out of hospital medicine and with six children, my colleagues were surprised when I passed my exams! I completed my training in Palmerston North.

In 2014 I took up a position in Whangarei, where initially I was the sole oncologist. At that time Whangarei was a satellite unit for Auckland DHB. After being there for about six months we recruited a second oncologist.

Not long after this we opened the Jim Carney Cancer Centre, a purpose-built cancer centre funded by the community. We continued to build up the cancer and blood service and we now have three oncologists, two haematologists, two registrars and a house officer as well as all nurses and support staff.

*Last year the centre received the Northland Community Innovation Award for their greatly improved model of service, which we're really proud of.*

I was close to being burnt out at the end of last year. One of my children had just had major open heart surgery, and working full time as well as being Head of Department became too much. I stepped down from my HOD role and started working four days a week. I'm now enjoying my work and family again.

### WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR JOB?

Without sounding clichéd, I love being able to help patients understand their diagnosis and treatment options.

There are a number of things we've tried to put in place to improve their cancer journey. One of them was tackling the waiting lists - most people now get an appointment in a week, although at times this can be longer. My best friend was diagnosed with cancer a few years ago and she had to wait three weeks to see someone. There is so much anxiety waiting for a diagnosis and explanation, we want to do better than this.

We have worked hard at creating a supportive environment for our patients with good and clear communication. Our motto is 'Te Waka Eke Noa' - "We are all on this journey together".

I've appreciated the support from the DHB managers to put in place a model of care that helps empower patients by putting them at the centre of their care.

### WHAT'S THE CHALLENGING ASPECT OF PRACTISING MEDICINE?

I think the most challenging aspect in the current climate is under-resourcing.

*We want to help patients as best we can but we are working in a time and resource-poor environment.*

This is very frustrating, and there continues to be pressure to do more with the same level of resourcing.

### WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH ASMS?

When I first started as a HOD, I wanted to understand every aspect of management so I went to all of the meetings and read everything I could. During that time I heard about the ASMS conference and I was interested in learning more and understanding the MECA. At the time of the conference the branch Vice President stood down. Ian Page suggested me to replace him and although I probably had too much on my plate, I agreed. It's been really interesting to be a part of ASMS and to attend the meetings and conferences.

### WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED OR LEARNT FROM YOUR ASMS INVOLVEMENT?

I think I have broadened my knowledge of what is and isn't acceptable, how job sizing works, what an employer can reasonably ask of you or not, those sorts of things.

Looking back I can see I was uninformed but I've also been surprised by how uninformed other specialists have been, even on issues about whether or not to stand up for themselves.

*It's good to talk to new specialists about what is and isn't acceptable and to try and support them.*

I've really noticed how different it is from DHB to DHB, too. Northland is a good DHB and I'm very well supported by the CMO and the general manager. We don't have problems with getting leave, or expenses or sabbaticals. It's a good place to work.

Outside of work, I love walking. Northland is an amazing place to climb the hills and take in the view. We have a 47-foot yacht that my husband has recently renovated. We had our first holiday on it this Easter in the Bay of Islands.