

# The top ten reasons to work in general practice

For those that hear the call, general practice can prove an immensely rewarding career choice, offering variety, challenge, community connection and flexibility. *medicSA* asked general practitioner **Dr Elaine Leung** what made her a generalist rather than a 'partialist'.

**H**AVING graduated from the University of New South Wales in 2001, I started general practice training in 2006 and completed my fellowship in 2008. I must confess that in the time in between I entertained the idea of other specialities, but I finally came to my senses and chose general practice. As a junior doctor I initially found myself enjoying every rotation and becoming increasingly confused as to which area was my vocation. Exhausted by the choices and frustrated with working in a big teaching hospital, I escaped to the Northern Territory for a year.

There I had the opportunity to work at small district hospitals run by general practitioners and Aboriginal medical services, and it was refreshing to work with people who genuinely loved their job. The work was interesting, varied and much appreciated.

General practice is defined by the RACGP as "the provision of primary continuing comprehensive whole-patient medical care to individuals, families and their communities. It involves the ability to take responsible action on any medical problem the patient presents, whether or not it forms part of an ongoing doctor-patient relationship".

I think this description captures much of what draws people to general practice. My task in this article, however, is to highlight what I think are the top ten reasons to work in general practice. My difficulty has been keeping it down to just ten, but here they are!

## 1. Variety

Every patient and every presentation is different. Whether it be a newborn, an elderly man with chronic disease or a pregnant woman, not knowing who and what will come through the door next is what keeps it interesting. Even when it is a regular patient whom you know well, they often surprise you.

## 2. Patient contact

The doctor-patient relationship is fundamental in general practice and this close professional relationship is most rewarding.

## 3. Continuity of care

Whilst I enjoyed the variety of a hospital emergency department, I was always left wondering, "What happened next?". General practice, however, allows you to follow the patient throughout their medical journey and through their lives. Families follow, and you have the opportunity to treat multiple generations in a family.

## 4. Flexibility

Full time or part-time, general practice and its training program are flexible. Work-life balance is much easier with the flexibility of choosing when you want to work.

## 5. Diversity

General practice covers the full breadth of care involving the biomedical, social, psychological and environmental aspects for each patient. A challenging task, but it keeps things interesting and patients appreciate a holistic approach. Whilst general practice is still about providing comprehensive care to patients, for those with special interests there is room to develop new and specific skills. GP obstetrics, anaesthetics, palliative care, sexual health ... the list goes on. The RACGP continues to develop a faculty of specific interests.

## 6. Portable skills

Just as it is great to work when you want, it is fantastic to work where you want to as well. Whether it be in urban or rural areas, or even overseas, the skills of a general practitioner are well recognised.

## 7. Community connection

Working in general practice means being part of the community, particularly in



rural areas. This not only assists you in understanding your patients better, it is also satisfying knowing you are a valued member of the community.

## 8. Training program

The training program is simply excellent. Wherever you train, the opportunities to learn and expand your knowledge and skills are endless. Supportive, flexible and innovative, with such a fantastic program, it's no wonder that I extended my training time!

## 9. Working in a team

General practice can for some be an isolating job. Stuck in a small room, seeing patients all day, every 15 minutes, doesn't sound like teamwork. But most practices do now work as teams. Not quite like hospital teams, but working together with allied health practitioners, practice nurses, reception staff and other general practitioners. This benefits both the patient and the GP. Working in medicine is a life-long education program and being in a team adds to that learning and provides that often-needed debriefing session.

## 10. Everyone needs a GP

People often say to me "it's so hard finding a good GP" – and everyone needs a GP, including you! So there is plenty of work out there: rise to the challenge, come join general practice and be a great GP.

*Elaine Leung is a faculty board member of the SA&NT faculty of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). She works part-time in general practice and is a PhD student at the University of Adelaide.*