

MOHAMMED QURASHI – ELECTIVE REFLECTION

When choosing to do my elective this year I was posed with the decision of whether I wanted to go somewhere strange and exotic and experience the spectrum medicine has to offer or whether I wanted to use it as an opportunity to test drive some of the decisions I was thinking of making regarding my future career, I decided to do the latter. It was met with some resistance from friends and family but I was adamant to make sure that I used this one of few remaining opportunities to see whether a life in general practice was really for me.

General practice has been under scrutiny in the papers of late by politicians and the public alike. Disgruntled patients fed up of not being able to get an appointment at their convenience has led to a rally by politicians promising a 7 day service. But those who are looking to enter the profession of general practice are still unsure as to how this will work as are those who are already general practitioners. It is difficult to say what changes will be made over the next five years, what has been promised is 8,000 new GPs being trained and extra funding being made available for primary care. But with fewer people opting to become general practitioners and many existing general practitioners considering retirement even if there are 8,000 new general practitioners over the next 5 years it will be difficult to tell whether that will be enough to meet the demands and expectations of patients to carry out an effective 7 day service.

One of the reasons why I have taken an interest in general practice is because there is no particular subject in Medicine that really grabs me and triggers enough passion and drive for me to commit to it exclusively, rather I like different aspects from many different specialities which makes general practice seem like the ideal route for me to go down and some of the experiences that I have had during this elective period have helped solidify this. The only fear I have is how much will general practice change by the time I would potentially finish my training and will these potential changes make me regret my decision.

One morning during the clinic I had three patients coming in one after the other with the same general diagnosis – depression. We had already seen another patient suffering depression earlier in the morning and by this time I had begun to realise just how common place the illness is and just how deeply it could affect every aspect of a person's life, be it their physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing or relationships they have with others.

The way I saw the general practitioner deal with one patient in particular really epitomised to me the holistic role of a general practitioner and the impact they have as the immediate point of contact for the majority of patients that require medical assistance in the community. Patient X had come in and the first thing he told us he didn't want to be there in the practice but a friend had made him come which immediately put the doctor on the back foot.

The patient went on to describe how he had been feeling teary very often and how this was not normal for him, he also began to disclose that he started to feel that his life was no longer worth living anymore but thankfully he had not contemplated any ways to take it and nor did he intend to for now. This had now become a very difficult situation and it was clear this person needed help but what could we as doctors do to help him.

The doctor then began to try and slowly unravel the root cause for these feelings and as expected in these scenarios they are usually multi-factorial. We came to discover how this patient had financial problems and how this was exacerbated by his inability to work any longer due to how he now felt. We also discovered he physically felt very tired and fatigued throughout the majority of the day and finally he also disclosed the fact of him not being able to see his son as often as he'd like due to the relationship he had with his son's mother.

On initial assessment of the above list it seemed that we could only really help him with the physical effects of the illness that he had been having and then hoping that this would help trigger change in the others but to my amazement the doctor was able to address all three issues effectively and with confidence.

The doctor was able to give the patient hope by telling him that there were ways we could help him and how these methods had worked for many many people in similar situations whilst still taking in to account the individual needs of this particular patient. He first started off by mentioning how he could help with the physical problems of feeling tired, fatigued and low in mood by prescribing some medication that would help give him the energy to start dealing with other problems he was having. This slowly began to reassure the patient and help him see that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

The doctor then went on to describe how it could be possible to deal with the financial issues the patient was facing, the patient was hesitant at first to take on board the doctors advise but once he could see the sincerity behind the actions of the doctor and how he only wanted what was best for him he agreed to give it a go. This then earned the patients trust when it came to advising the patient with regards to his final problem.

Watching these series of events happen in the space of ten minutes and seeing the doctor not only fulfil his rights towards his patient as a physician but also as a human being allowed me to see the intimate nature of the patient doctor relationship that is experienced in general practice. It is a profession that allows you to know your patients better than most other specialties in medicine. It is also a profession that prides itself in being the grassroots of medicine, making a difference on a community wide level. Regardless of how the dynamics of general practice changes over the coming years these are two aspects which are established firm in the role of a general practitioner and both appeal to me greatly.

Even though the future of general practice seems somewhat unclear and it is very likely that the workload will increase without an increase in other incentives one thing that will not change compared to other professions is the opportunity of forming high quality and close relationships with your patients and being able to have the opportunity to treat them as a human being and not just as the sum total of a number of test results and signs and symptoms. This aspect of general practice during my elective has helped me cement my decision of pursuing a career in general practice in the future.

Word Count: 1999