

Rediscovering Your Purpose as a Doctor

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In his compelling article, Dr Ben Bravery, a former cancer patient turned doctor, delves into the importance of purpose in the medical field. Drawing from his personal journey and experiences, he emphasises the need for medical professionals to define their "why" - their fundamental reason for choosing this path. Dr Bravery highlights how this sense of purpose not only drives exceptional patient care but also helps doctors navigate challenges and maintain their passion throughout their careers.

I started my medical career as a patient. It's not the normal way of doing things, but neither was getting cancer at 28. Bowel cancer to be exact. Stage three to be precise. After radiation, chemotherapy and surgery, I knew I needed a career change, so I dived straight into the system that had saved me.

On day one of internship, I was full of purpose and passion. I was also terrified. I found my feet. We all do. And just when I grew comfortable with a particular illness signature, cluster of medications and consultant expectations, it was time to rotate and start again. The only constant was my reason for doing all this in the first place.

I entered medicine to make things better – for patients and those looking after them. We are as dependent on patients as they are on us.

But change is difficult, slow, and non-linear.

Last year I published *The Patient Doctor*, a book about transitioning from cancer patient to medical student, to junior doctor. In it, I describe aspects of patient care that desperately need improving and how the health system needs to do a better job of caring for those providing the care.

After a recent book talk, a junior doctor who had left medicine asked, "Have you ever wanted to quit? Have you ever doubted your decision?" Another junior doctor, still in the system but clearly dissatisfied, asked, "How do you stay positive?"

They aren't alone.

This year's Medical Training Survey of over 23,000 doctors-in-training found that around one in five doctors are considering or have considered leaving medicine in the past 12 months. There are lots of reasons for this and you already know some of them from your time as a med student.

But one reason we don't often talk about is a lack of purpose. Medical schools do a good job of teaching facts (thewhat) and skills (the how), but they are not as good at teaching, reinforcing, and nurturing thewhy - why one is a doctor in the first place.

Many students enter medical school with high grades and on autopilot. Often, they do not think about the why. Medical school is intense and there is a race to learn everything as quickly as possible. Many get through it by keeping their heads down, going through the motions and ignoring the why.

Now is the time to switch off autopilot. Now is the time to work out who you are and what kind of doctor you want to be.

Spend as much time checking On Call and UpToDate as you do thinking about your voice. Watch your colleagues. Observe registrars and consultants. Learn from nurses. Find the part of the job that fuels your fire. Then protect that fire and look after yourself.

Defining your why now will help you down the track, during rough patches and times of heightened stress. Medicine is a long game after all.

Remember, your purpose is your greatest asset. It will be with you long after the glow of passing an exam wears off. Your purpose is the key to showing up every day and authentically connecting with patients and colleagues. Purpose is what makes a good doctor become an amazing doctor.

To purchase a copy of Dr Bravery's book, 'The Patient Doctor' [click here](#).
