

# Keeping an open mind: lessons from the early years of emergency medicine

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When Dr Emanuel “Manny” Cassimatis was looking for the right career, he wanted to find something that was intellectually stimulating and altruistic. Medicine felt like the perfect fit.

Like many doctors, his career path hasn’t followed a straight line. From an early interest in sports medicine, including an elective with the Brisbane Broncos Rugby League Club, to rural generalist training, he then discovered a strong affinity for emergency medicine while taking a gap year working in Ireland as an Emergency Registrar.

Manny is now completing a paediatrics term as an Emergency Registrar at the Queensland Children’s Hospital. Each step he has taken so far has added something valuable to his development.

His journey offers plenty of practical insights for medical students and junior doctors navigating their own steps, particularly at the start of a new year when rotations change and career decisions can feel front of mind.

## Useful tips for medical students and junior doctors

### 1. Make the most of early clinical opportunities

Recognising the high-value learning environments available to you during medical school can help you take full advantage of them. As a student, you’re often invited into resuscitation bays, intensive care units and theatres. You may observe, and sometimes assist, with procedures that you might not get given even as an intern or junior house officer. Exposure to these clinical experiences help to shape your confidence and clinical reasoning in ways that may not always be obvious at the time.

“Some of the experiences that you get as a medical student is access to settings that you may not actually see again for quite a long time. So, make the most of the opportunities that are likely to be scarce when you’re a junior doctor,” advises Manny.

### 2. Get uncomfortable with uncertainty

Emergency medicine demands a high tolerance for uncertainty. Manny describes it as a steady learning curve. Early on, you may feel like you don’t know much, but as your confidence grows, so does your ability to form your own clinical reasoning.

At the same time, he emphasises the importance of using senior clinicians as a touchstone while you’re training, testing your thinking against their experience and understanding what you might not see.

“Even if you are senior, it’s very much encouraged as best practice to take a collaborative approach. Chat to your seniors and fellow registrars to see what their approach is. Quite often you end up reaching the same conclusion, but sometimes they differ,” advises Manny.

He also emphasises the importance of including the patient in shared decision-making. Laying out the treatment options to patients and the risks associated with each can empower patients and strengthen trust.

### 3. Protect your wellbeing, especially during shift work

Shift work is an inevitable part of medical training and it can be demanding. Practical planning is therefore essential to protect your wellbeing.

For Manny, sleep is non-negotiable. Creating a dark, quiet sleep environment, using a sleep mask, and keeping devices out of the bedroom are essential strategies he relies on.

“I think the main thing is prioritising sleep and utilising as many strategies as possible to ensure you get good sleep so that you’re functioning at a good level,” advises Manny.

He also breaks large rosters into manageable blocks and uses his days off intentionally to reset – getting outdoors and catching up at home.

### 4. Keep an open mind as your career evolves

You don’t need to have your speciality mapped out early. Rotations you hadn’t considered may surprise you, and experiences that seem peripheral may later become central.

"There were things in medical school that I didn't think would be relevant to me that have now proved themselves to be much more relevant. So, take the opportunity to do things that are difficult and keep an open mind," reflects Manny.

Making the most of the opportunities in front of you, even if you don't know where they will lead, can open new pathways. Focusing on training opportunities, seeking guidance from senior mentors and remaining adaptable can shape your career – often in ways you don't expect.

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