

Saying yes to the unexpected: lessons from a less traditional path

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When UK-trained Dr Lizzie Baggus moved to Australia in 2023 as a PGY3, she planned to stay for just one year. Three years later, she's still here.

Now a PGY6, Lizzie works as a locum medical registrar. Since arriving, she has worked across general medicine, geriatrics, oncology and intensive care. Her registrar roles, including in intensive care, have been medical registrar and principal house officer (PHO) terms outside of an accredited training program. Her career has taken her from Liverpool (UK), where she trained, to Melbourne, Tasmania and Far North Queensland. Along the way, she has been working out where her interests lie.

Alongside her locum work, she is studying for exams and making plans for specialty training applications next year, with the hope of pursuing dermatology. The specialty appeals to her because it combines diagnostic problem-solving with procedural and surgical work. Working in other specialties has strengthened that interest rather than distracted from it. In general medicine, she saw many dermatology cases and how much these conditions can affect patients' mental health and quality of life.

Her journey offers practical insights for medical students and junior doctors who feel pressure to have their careers mapped out from the start.

Useful tips for medical students and junior doctors

1. You don't need to have it all figured out

Medicine can make it feel as though everyone else has a five-year plan. In reality, careers change constantly. Lizzie's route has been far less linear than she expected at medical school, and she sees that as a positive. Exploring different areas of medicine has helped her discover what she actually enjoys, rather than simply following the path she initially thought she should.

"I moved from the UK to Australia without knowing exactly where it would take me, worked in specialties I never expected to work in, and discovered new interests along the way. Looking back, I think being open to opportunities rather than trying to control every step has been one of the best things I've done," says Lizzie.

She also encourages saying yes to opportunities, particularly those that take you outside your comfort zone. Moving countries and working in completely different healthcare environments was daunting at first. She says it has probably been one of the most valuable things she has done, both professionally and personally.

2. Make peace with uncertainty

Working as a medical registrar can bring a lot of responsibility early in your career. That often means managing very unwell patients who can deteriorate quickly. Lizzie says the biggest learning curve has been accepting that you rarely have complete certainty. You make the best decision you can with the information in front of you, communicate clearly with the team and are prepared to change course.

"As a medical student, I think I saw uncertainty as something that meant you didn't know enough. As you gain experience, you realise that uncertainty is just part of medicine," she explains.

Even experienced doctors encounter presentations they've never seen before. The difference is becoming comfortable with knowing what you don't know, working out what information you need and asking for help.

3. Learn from the whole team

Medicine is highly collaborative, and some of Lizzie's biggest lessons have come from nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists and other members of the multidisciplinary team. Locum work has also meant regularly joining new teams, in settings ranging from large city hospitals to regional and rural Australia.

4. Remember how you make patients feel

Early in her career, a boss told Lizzie that patients rarely remember the exact medical details of what you told them, but they do remember how you made them feel. As a junior doctor, she was focused on getting everything technically right. Over time, she realised that spending a few extra minutes with a patient or explaining something properly matters just as much.

"To me it's another day at work, but to the patient in front of me this could be the day their life changed forever," reflects Lizzie.

She also finds palliative care deeply rewarding and believes it isn't spoken about enough, given the difference good care can make

to patients and their families.

5. Build a life outside medicine

Lizzie relies on the people around her and on having things outside medicine to look forward to, including always having a holiday booked. Getting outdoors, exercising, travelling, camping and spending time with family and friends all help. So do longer-term goals that remind her there's a bigger picture beyond a difficult rotation.

"Medicine is a huge part of your life, but it doesn't need to be your whole life, and you don't need to have everything figured out now," advises Lizzie.

Staying open to opportunities, leaning on the people around you and making room for life beyond work can help shape a career, and a life, you enjoy.

Follow Lizzie's journey

You can follow Lizzie on Instagram at [@drlizzieinaus](#), where she shares practical advice and honest reflections on working as a doctor in Australia, relocating from the UK, career progression and maintaining balance outside of work.

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