A Fellowship Further Afield

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In the current climate of uncertainty over trainee working conditions and uneasy medical politics, more and more trainees are choosing to take planned time out of training. This is no longer considered an activity that unnecessarily prolongs one's training, and is generally welcomed by trainees and training programme directors alike.

Time out of training comes in many shapes and sizes. These may be in the form of an out of programme experience, approved clinical training, career break or research (OOPE/OOPT/OOPC/OOPR). Some trainees opt for formal leadership and management experience, in the form of the National Medical Director's Fellowship Scheme, whilst others may undertake a Darzi Fellowship in Clinical Leadership. Some may prefer time out to teach and there are several teaching and simulation fellowships available. Other trainees may wish to take a year out of their own speciality but continue clinical work in another area. There are many specialities whereby trainees are almost always expected to undertake some form of research.

Time out of programme can have numerous benefits, including the break that may prevent trainees from burn out. Many trainees use this time to expand on any professional or personal interests they have. The skills and tools gained almost always benefit the trainee and the specialty, and may give trainees something additional to talk about at future interviews. This can also be a great networking opportunity, allowing trainees to build connections that may be invaluable in the future. It is also an opportunity to explore new ideas, new ways of working and an opportunity to develop oneself outside of medicine.

It was for all of the above reasons that I decided to apply for time out of training. I wanted to undertake a non-traditional fellowship that would allow me to form my own objectives and explore an area of personal interest. During my search for this, I came across the Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship.

This Fellowship was established in 1965 as a living memorial following the death of Sir Winston Churchill. It is open to anyone in the United Kingdom and the aim is to help individuals who want to contribute towards improving their community or profession. To date over 5000 Fellowships have been awarded to a range of categories including medical practice and education, nursing and allied health professionals, young people and many more. This Fellowship funds individuals for between four to eight weeks for their travels and living costs. Upon returning, a report is submitted for the Churchill Memorial Trust and then individuals are officially awarded a Fellowship. The Medicine category is delivered in partnership with The Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh and those who have been awarded Fellowships in this category include doctors, medical educators, managers and health charity workers.

I was awarded this prestigious Fellowship in the medicine category to learn more about Hospitalist Medicine in Chicago and its potential application to the UK. This allowed me to observe and explore a fundamentally different health care system and observe how medicine is practised in a different environment. After a period of observation and reflection, I concluded that although the idea of Hospitalist Medicine is aspirational, we currently do not have the resources or the manpower to develop such a service in the United Kingdom. However, there are many aspects of care and training that we can emulate in order to improve the services we provide for our patients.

Undertaking this Fellowship, has not only allowed me to make some high profile contacts that will no doubt be invaluable in my future career, but it has also given me many transferrable skills. It has given me the confidence to speak out, it has made me more inquisitive and made me understand that we may not be able to change things overnight, but that each one of us is able to make small incremental changes in our work. I have now found myself a niche in Acute Medicine that I would like to continue exploring throughout my career.

This Fellowship is a unique opportunity and allows you to experience and indulge in something that you are interested in. It gives you that time out to reflect on your experiences, which we know is so valuable yet so rare in our busy clinical lives. The prestigious title of a Winston Churchill Fellow will give you credibility in your future endeavours, and if anything, will incite people's curiosity in you. I feel extremely lucky that I had the opportunity to undertake this Fellowship, and feel that it has provided me with skills that will help me navigate my way through a challenging and rewarding career in Acute Internal Medicine.

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