



WHY I CHOSE A CAREER IN CLINICAL ONCOLOGY

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If I'm honest, I wasn't sure about being a medic and would always come up with many other careers that I thought would have suited me better. That was, until I discovered clinical oncology. Clinical oncology had variety, lots of different people to talk to, research and the prospect of different challenges throughout a long consultant life. I've been a consultant for 8 years and am delighted to be able to say that all those things I thought about clinical oncology are true.

I am a clinical academic which means that half of my time is spent as a clinician, looking after patients with prostate and bladder cancer and treating them with radiotherapy and chemotherapy. The other half of my time I spend in research. The clinical side of my job keeps me grounded. It can be easy to get lost in the science, but seeing the patients and how treatment affects them is essential to work out what questions need to be answered to improve what we do day in, day out. But it's not only seeing the patients that make it worth getting out of bed every day. Clinical oncology has a real team-working philosophy whether it's with other doctors or with nurses, radiographers or physicists. One of my old bosses once told me that "nice people do oncology" and, most of the time, it does feel like that.

My research time provides a different sort of satisfaction. It is all about "team science". I work very closely with physicists and biologists, with everyone bringing their core skills to the party so that we can ask the right searching questions, get the answers and then see improvements in treatment. It is hard work. We can spend hours brain-storming, writing grants, performing experiments and analysing data, sometimes only to find that things haven't turned out the way we had hoped. But all you need is one successful grant, one positive result or one paper with your name in black and white and it all feels worth it. One of the perks of research is meeting other like-minded people from other countries at meetings and conferences. There is so much to be gained by swapping ideas and learning how others do things. Believe it or not, sometimes other colleagues learn from the NHS too! Research done in the UK has formed the standard for international radiotherapy in breast and prostate cancer to name but two and that's something that we are all proud of.

So going back to what I wanted out of my medical career.....I have variety with the combination of clinical medicine and academia, lots of interesting, enthusiastic like-minded people to talk to and with cancer rates increasing as the population changes and new technologies and treatments, the prospect of a long and stimulating consultant life.