

**Victoria Kim and Liz Croton** describe their recent experiences of unemployment

# (Un)employment

## – the long and the short

### key points

Unemployment now faces junior doctors because of increasing competition for training posts. Doctors trained outside the EU require a permit to work in the UK, and fewer jobs are available for newly qualified GPs. Two CMF members share their recent experiences.

Victoria Kim came from Uzbekistan to develop her skills in cardiology but for more than two years could find no employment. God's word helped her during 'times of utter despair' and she learnt where her identity really lay. She is now a respiratory registrar.

Elizabeth Croton is a GP in Birmingham. For four months between contracts she kept afloat on locums, but shares honestly about valuable lessons of submission and obedience to God learnt through painful times.

Back in 2005, the British Medical Association warned about the threat of unemployment facing junior doctors due to increasing competition for training posts.<sup>1</sup> Added to this came the news in 2006 that doctors trained outside the EU would require a work permit to work in the UK, thus severely limiting their opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Newly qualified GPs have also come into the spotlight with fewer jobs available for them after qualification.<sup>3</sup> All these developments make unemployment among doctors a real concern.

As Christian doctors, our hope lies in the Lord, but how does that translate when the rubber hits the road? Two doctors share their experiences of unemployment.

### 'What do you do?'



*Victoria Kim is a specialist registrar working in the UK*

I was born and grew up in Uzbekistan (then Uzbek Soviet Republic), of Korean ethnicity. I became a Christian because I always believed there was more to life than 'this big Universe'. I wanted to study medicine and so I applied to the First State Tashkent Medical Institute in Uzbekistan. My friends thought this was an insane decision as it was known to be difficult to get into. I was accepted

and made a promise to God that I would continue to study his Word. At the time I belonged to an excellent Baptist church in Tashkent with superb teaching.

After graduation, I applied for my residency. I was interested in research and dreamed of training in interventional cardiology. I felt that a placement in the UK could give me the experience I needed. I prayed that God would provide for me financially – which he did through a friend's loan – and started preparing for the PLAB exam to enable me to practise in the UK. By God's mercy I passed it on the first attempt. It was then I faced unemployment. I saw many of my friends struggling to secure a job and I struggled to believe that God was in control. I had always thought that if you worked and studied hard you would find employment but this theory was proved wrong when I received no reply from the dozens of applications I submitted throughout the UK.

While in this trial, God provided me with a local Christian couple who became my 'English parents'. They provided me with advice, support and prayer. He also provided me with Christian friends and timely clinical attachments. As a clinical attaché I was able to gain experience on a voluntary basis as an introduction to the NHS. Although I was not earning, I never went hungry as God provided again through people, and I always had a warm house to go to and clothes to wear.

At times of utter despair, I relied on his word. I meditated regularly on verses such as:

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).*

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9).*

My other problem was my identity. I was a Russian-speaking Korean Uzbek living in the UK! I realised that much of my identity had been tied up in what I was doing. I had been a medical student and then a cardiology resident and now I was doing nothing. I became sharply aware that I had no answer to the question that everybody asks on introductions – namely ‘What do you do?’ I was unemployed from December 2004 until February 2007. During that time I prepared for exams, continued in my clinical attachments, and worked as an honorary clinical fellow.

You might wonder what happened next. I persevered and secured a place as a part-time maternity locum. I then worked my way through various SHO positions before stepping up as an acting respiratory specialist registrar. With God’s help, I completed my MRCP exam and am now working as a respiratory registrar. Slowly but surely, God made a way for me at his pace. Through my experiences, I learnt that God is good all the time and working for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). My identity lies within him rather than in my status as a doctor, and through his grace I can now identify with those who too are going through unemployment.

## Our identity is in Christ, not our degrees



*Elizabeth Croton is a Birmingham-trained GP who became a Christian in 1997. During 2008 she experienced a period of unemployment after being made redundant from a salaried GP position*

As I approached the end of my registrar year, I started to become increasingly anxious about finding a job. I had been writing for the GP newspapers for a number of years and was involved in one of their internet forums – ‘GP35’ – which endeavoured to showcase the opinions of GPs under the age of 35 on their magazine website. The rumour mill was flooded with stories of newly qualified GPs being out of work and having to survive on the ‘hand to mouth’ existence of locum work. This didn’t bother me initially, but then stories began to abound about the locum market being flooded and there being little opportunity for career progression.

I decided to send a copy of my CV to every practice in the PCT explaining that I was looking for work. By ‘pure chance’ I received a call from a practice about a salaried position they were about

to advertise. They needed somebody with some surgical experience and felt that I would be ideal. I went to the interview and was offered the job. Initially it was a six-month contract but I was told in all likelihood it would be a permanent post.

I must stress that all this job-seeking was done largely without God’s guidance. Yes, I read the Bible and prayed regularly but I felt that I didn’t have time to ‘wait for the Lord’ (Psalm 27:14). The job was stimulating but I knew practice budgets were becoming tighter and staff were being laid off. I had been there four months when I discovered that another salaried GP appointed before me was not having her contract renewed, for ‘financial reasons’. Shortly afterwards I was told the same. I had just over a month to find myself another job.

This was a real blow to my confidence and I became increasingly anxious regarding my future. I was worried that future employers would view my redundancy in a negative light and raise questions about my clinical competence. Like Victoria, I meditated on the Bible and tried to convince myself that God was working for my good through all this (Romans 8:28). I also dreaded people asking me about how my career was going. My identity had been centred on my status for so long and now this was stripped away from me.

I was forced to turn to the Lord and cling to him instead:

*But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you (Psalm 39:7).*

I became extremely envious of those GPs who had secure jobs because I felt they were better than me. I had always been ambitious but now that ambition was becoming jealousy, and if I am honest with myself I wished at times the same thing would happen to them so they would know how I felt – another example of ‘selfish ambition’ leading to sin (Galatians 5:19-21). I also began to worry about money – not because I was in debt but because I wanted the security of knowing I had a regular income. I didn’t trust that the Lord would provide for me.

I managed through locum work to keep afloat for the next four months. The Lord had taught me a valuable lesson regarding submission and obedience and I tried to walk closely with him through praying and reading his Word. Again ‘by chance’ I was approached by a practice who had received my CV and I now work on a permanent basis for them. I realise I am lucky – the Lord did provide but this is not the main moral of the story for me. As Christian doctors, our identity is in Christ, not our degrees and for me it took the loss of my regular work to realise this. I won’t ever forget this lesson though.



My identity lies within him rather than in my status as a doctor

## references

1. [tinyurl.com/ydaps7l](http://tinyurl.com/ydaps7l)
2. [tinyurl.com/yf6g5nn](http://tinyurl.com/yf6g5nn)
3. [tinyurl.com/ye9jbg](http://tinyurl.com/ye9jbg)