

Rachael Pickering looks at this increasingly popular career pathway



Portfolio careers

key points

Charles Handy, Oxbridge management guru, coined the term portfolio career in the late eighties. It describes a CV made up of several careers rather than one full-time job. Doctors are beginning to branch out into portfolio careers, and several CMF members have very successful ones. Advantages include flexibility, family time, and job satisfaction; disadvantages include unpredictability and financial uncertainties. Everyone's career and talents are unique and there are many different ways of developing a satisfying and manageable portfolio career. The opportunities to serve God through portfolio work are endless.

They are the latest fashion accessories for medical CVs. But what exactly is a portfolio career? Why would you want one? And how can you get one?

Job for life?

Even within the relatively stable working environment of the medical world, there has been a move away from the traditional 'one job for life'. It is no longer rare for GP partners and consultants to move practice or hospital. Going a step further and diversifying, many doctors are acquiring more than one string to their medical bows by carving out portfolio careers for themselves.

The eighteenth century Italian word *portafoglio* describes as a folder used to carry around loose paper and drawings, hence modern day artists' portfolios. Today though, it has come to mean the collection of an individual's talents and skills.¹

The concept of a portfolio career is attributed to Charles Handy, Oxbridge management guru and social philosopher.² In the late eighties, he predicted that workers would start to want more active control of their careers by having lots of small jobs.³ And indeed, although Handy didn't specifically mention medical careers in his prediction, NHS portfolio doctors are becoming less of a rarity.⁴ And within CMF, several members are putting their bulging portfolios to use for the Kingdom of God.

Ministering surgeon

Until recently, Hugh Thomson was a full time consultant upper GI surgeon. Now he works one day a week for the NHS doing endoscopies:

I spend the rest of my time as a pastor at Birmingham City Church. Combining roles is stimulating. Working in the NHS keeps my feet on the ground and gives me opportunities to share my faith. I do miss surgery and (to be perfectly honest) being important! But I have absolutely no regrets in making the change. I do think that my years in full time medical work have equipped me for pastoral ministry in a way that no Bible college could have done.

Hippocratic GP

GP Rhona Knight has found herself increasingly drawn towards the Hippocratic tradition of medical education:

After ten years of juggling GP partnership with the needs of my growing family, I resigned and became a salaried GP whilst seeking God's guidance for my career. In my PDP (Professional Development Plan) I identified a love of teaching and a need to develop a special interest.

I became a GPwSI (GP with Special Interest) after obtaining a Diploma in Practical Dermatology, and have just finished an MA in Medical Education. I now find myself with a portfolio career that includes salaried GP work, undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, and a

growing interest in bioethics and its communication to non-specialist audiences.

Looking back, I was always interested in teaching, but I didn't know that that was what I'd end up doing. I'm much happier; life, though a bit of a juggling act, is so much more flexible.

Paediatric youthworker

Chris Richards combines being a Newcastle consultant paediatrician with disaster medicine and charity work:

In April this year I went part-time in order to work for Lovewise, a charity I started up that goes into schools and youth groups to talk about Christian perspectives on marriage, sex and relationships. I give class presentations, meet with headteachers, and write booklets. My clinical job helps give me credibility with teachers, which is a big help!

I appreciate being able to serve the Lord in two very different ways. As a paediatrician I care for children and parents, whilst as director of Lovewise I use my creative gifts to change the hearts and lives of children.

Occasionally I go to refugee crises around the world, as I spent three years of my training working in refugee camps in Africa and Asia. My trust usually lets me go, and it usually continues to pay me!

Prime educator

Huw Morgan combines GP appraisal work with an international consultancy role in family medicine development and education:

I spend most of my time volunteering with Partnerships in International Medical Education (PRIME), a Christian charity linked to CMF. This involves many trips to developing countries but there's also admin work to do back home. It is very exciting to have opportunities to present Christian truth as part of good medical practice to Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist healthcare workers, and to establish training programmes with Christian person-centred care at their core.

As a junior I could never have predicted that I would be doing this now. I always had an interest in overseas work but at that time thought only in terms of the traditional missionary doctor role. The world has changed, and teaching and empowering others in Christ's name is very much the necessary 21st Century paradigm. I thoroughly recommend it!

Pros and cons

A portfolio career can get very complicated. Trevor Stammers' portfolio includes being a GP principal and tutor, writing for both religious and academic press, speaking at various events such as CARE, broadcasting, and writing books on his area of expertise, sexual health. On top of all this, he's also studying for an MA in Bioethics:

The biggest problem I face is when my different careers collide: for example, my GP partners have to carry the can when I have to attend an urgent meeting regarding one of my other roles. In addition, two part time jobs can easily grow to become two fulltime jobs. So you have to prune them regularly! A separate problem is

that others may doubt your commitment to their particular venture as you are 'only part-time'.

Accountability can be non-existent in all or some spheres of your life so you can get isolated, lonely and too remote. Family life, if not prioritised, can easily suffer too.

But, on the other hand, a portfolio career can be enormously invigorating. One job may help to feed another. I find that my stress levels are lower because I have various interesting roles and don't become preoccupied by one particular fulltime stress. And my family is better off with a happy portfolio doctor than with a miserable full time GP!

Random choice or divine calling?

It's tempting to see our medical career paths as being down to good (or bad) luck or random chance. But many senior Christian medics look down the retro-spectroscope and see that events which seemed random at the time were actually part of the Lord's sovereign plan for their lives.

As Christians, how can we discern whether God is calling us down particular career pathways? It's so easy to fret over career moves but the apostle Paul advises otherwise: 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God'.⁵ On occasion, it may be appropriate to lay down the odd fleece.⁶ Often it's wise to seek general guidance from the Bible, and then push a few doors.⁷

Interested?

Although it's vitally important to get thoroughly trained in your major speciality of interest, it's never too early to start exploring more diverse career options. Most portfolio doctors diversify their careers as seniors but early opportunities do come along to some juniors.

Consider your talents and skills, and your career so far. What do you enjoy most about medicine? Is there anything you can't bear? Have there been any twists in your career plan so far? Do you have training in more than one speciality? Consider also your personality, lifestyle and family. Not everyone can cope with the downsides of portfolio careers.

Sometimes though, simply looking at your CV doesn't help diverse career paths spring to mind. Another way of looking at your career is to map out your life and employment history as a flow chart on a large piece of card. Remember to mark in all the co-existing factors in your life – children and spouse, hobbies and time constraints, strengths and weaknesses, and don't forget your ambitions. Show it to a couple of trusted friends, a non-medical as well as a fellow doctor, and ask where they think your strengths and weaknesses lie.

At the end of the day, most doctors will continue to pursue traditional career pathways. But, no matter how many careers end up in our portfolios, may all our career choices work together for the glory of our Lord.⁸

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My family is better off with a happy portfolio doctor

portfolio benefits

- Combine hobbies with professional talents
- Family benefits
- Flexibility
- Home working opportunities
- Satisfaction
- Self-determination
- Sense of freedom

portfolio problems

- Ego sacrifices
- Financial consequences
- Juggling acts
- Peer criticism
- Uncertainty

references

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7. Psalm 119:105
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