

**Sarah Maidment** shares the experience of changing specialties



# CHANGING DIRECTION

**I** think you'd be better suited to General Practice.' My mother's words hung heavily in my mind. I had received offers of specialty training in paediatrics from two different deaneries. Not one but two doors had opened for me in paediatrics. I felt this was where God was leading me. The question in my mind was not, 'which specialty?' but rather, 'Which deanery?' *'Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight'* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

My parents, both doctors, inspired me to study medicine. I had always thought I would follow in their footsteps, training in general practice. Throughout medical school and my Foundation jobs, I discovered I enjoyed paediatrics. Having been encouraged by a number of influential, enthusiastic paediatricians, a medical school prize and a publication, I started to consider seriously a career in this specialty.

Ultimately, I wanted to serve God and glorify him in my work – whatever I ended up doing – and to train in a specialty that I could usefully take abroad to a developing country.

*'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart'* (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

## Specialty training applications

I applied for Paediatrics in the two most competitive deaneries in the UK, so I thought it would be wise to apply for general practice as a back-up option.

This was a stressful time for my peers but I had a real sense of peace, knowing that God was in control and that whatever happened the outcome was safe in his hands.

*'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose'* (Romans 8:28).

## Paediatrics ST1

I found the transition to specialty training particularly difficult. I had moved to a new deanery, leaving behind all of my friends, church and a hospital where I was known, trusted and 'knew the system'.

I found paediatrics stressful: screaming children, anxious parents. Even a simple task such as taking blood became a mammoth undertaking, requiring several pairs of hands, a box of toys and a great deal of nerve. I struggled to 'perform' to the level of perfection expected of me.

It was a busy hospital in a deprived area, with a demanding, exhausting rota. I felt unsupported by my seniors. There were times when I arrived at work in tears. This wasn't me. It was a real challenge to be a shining light for Jesus in the workplace when I was struggling to be joyful in my work.

*'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus'* (1Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Thankfully, God had prepared the way for me. Despite leaving behind my 'social network' I quickly settled into a local church and joined a home group. My new church family gave me a tremendous amount of support through this difficult time.

## A change of direction

It was becoming clear that paediatrics was not the career for me. I was going to have to make some important decisions. Training in paediatrics would mean at least seven more years of shift work. I would still be working night shifts as a consultant. It would be a challenge to combine this career with my extra-curricular interests. I had just started racing for a women's cycling team and longed to serve more actively at church.

I had to consider the 'contextual' factors. Would things have been different if I had started my training in a different hospital, or with friends and family nearby? Would the grass really be greener on the other side?

After much prayer, I talked things through with a consultant whom I trusted and decided to apply for GP training.

## Specialty training applications: take 2

Interviews came round. I was more nervous the second time round but I felt better prepared, having had an extra year of experience. I trusted that God had a plan and I was open to the fact that this might be to struggle on and serve him in paediatrics.

I was overjoyed to be offered a place on the Oxford GP training scheme. Rather than rushing into a decision, I spent time praising God and seeking his guidance.

So where was God in all of this? Why would God open doors into a career in paediatrics and then seemingly close them again? Did I spend enough time praying and committing everything to the Lord the first time round? Could this year in paediatrics be preparing me for something in the future? I felt God was leading me into general practice, so I accepted the offer.

## And so to Oxford...

Changing specialties was the best decision I could have made and I don't have any regrets. Once I had settled into another new hospital and overcome my fear of relatively enormous cannulas, I started to enjoy work again, arriving with a smile on my face and a spring in my step, overflowing with joy that only comes from the Lord.

*'Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance'* (James 1:2-3).

*'I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus'* (Philippians 3:14).

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