

our identities in Christ

four different medical professionals explain their personal identity in Christ

FY1

Kate Earnshaw describes her identity in Christ in her first year as a doctor

I hadn't fully appreciated how much being a Christian shaped my identity as an FY1 until I started to struggle spiritually.

With erratic schedules, I have been regularly unable to go to church and small group, on which I had been somewhat reliant as props for my faith. During this time, work was a challenge; the out-of-hours shifts felt horribly lonely, and I was finding colleagues and patients very frustrating. God, through his wonderful grace, helped me to grow a more personal relationship with him and transformed the way I relate to work. Since accepting him into my work life I know that my Lord is walking with me and that I'm not alone. This has been my ultimate comfort and strength.

Being a Christian helps me to see patients and colleagues in their true identities as Christ's image-bearers. Patients can be rude and unpleasant, and it can be tempting to dismiss what seem like trivial symptoms or complaints. Doctors are sometimes inefficient and create more work, resulting in unnecessary overtime. I sometimes find myself getting quite angry and resentful, despite knowing logically that it's all for the good of our patients. Knowing that all humans are made in God's image and are his dearly loved children has challenged me to love them better and serve them



more sacrificially. Although everyday tasks can seem menial, I know that God has put me where I am and that it is him I'm serving. When I spend a whole day writing discharge letters, I constantly have to remind myself of this! The NHS can be a minefield of cynicism with teams seemingly competing not to look after patients. Only by truly loving patients can we fight this dangerous prevailing attitude. One way I've seen doctors do this is to take on extra patients and responsibility to ensure patients get the care they need. I'm hoping God will give me the grace to do this too as it doesn't seem to come naturally!

God has been amazing at showing me how he can act through anyone - including me! I regularly feel inadequate at work and that my clinical knowledge is shocking, and yet there have been times where I have had a gut feeling that I need to do an investigation and then this has proved to be something very serious. I have no doubt that this is God working through me and it is such a privilege that he would use me as a tool for his purposes on Earth.

Being a Christian FY1 doctor is challenging, tiring, and rewarding in equal measure. I am so grateful that God has put me here. ■

Kate Earnshaw is an FY1 doctor working in Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge.



Zack Millar is *Nucleus* student editor and an interim FY1 doctor in East Anglia and co-ordinated the stories here

middle grade doctor

Enhui Yong explores the role of the medical registrar



I am a Christian working as a medical registrar. The role is generally considered to be one of the more challenging jobs in hospital; however, like all things, I promise it definitely does get easier with practice! I think passing postgraduate exams and going through Internal Medical Training is sufficient preparation. Your main tasks are to run the acute take, provide medical input for other specialties and to support your juniors. You will need a good grasp of general medicine, be competent in medical procedures and have good communication skills to have a conversation with other specialties.

I like the role. You can make a genuine difference to patient care in your hospital. In addition, the knowledge and skills gained are valuable whatever your base specialty.

I believe being a Christian at work is no different for each of us whatever our role. As a Christian, I am a deeply flawed, morally bankrupt human, who was chosen before I was made and outrageously loved by a holy God to be adopted as his son through Jesus. My sins are fully forgiven, and I have been saved by grace through faith to walk in good works that God prepared for me to do. All this to bring glory to him! (Ephesians 1-2)

Knowing this changes my perspective as I work.

Despite the stresses and strains of the daily job, I am called to walk differently, to put off my old self, which is corrupt, and to put on my new self as I imitate Christ. At work it means trying to speak the truth, not gossiping, being kind, fleeing immorality, obeying my bosses and supporting those under me. (Ephesians 4-6)

Particular challenges that I have encountered at this stage have included the level of responsibility, even out of hours, and increasing workloads. Work can become an idol and it is tempting to be impatient in a busy environment. Nonetheless, through the gospel I can change. Titus 3:1-8 says *'Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures... But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy ...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.'* As we reflect on this trustworthy saying, we can be extraordinarily encouraged and devote ourselves to doing what is good at work. ■

Enhui Yong is a medical registrar in London

consultant

Adrian Harris reflects on life as a Consultant Laparoscopic/Upper GI Surgeon

I have been a consultant for 15 years, but still recall much of my junior experience. In the first week of my very first clinical student placement, the consultant surgeon spotted my Crusader¹ tie and from that little acorn, an oak tree of Christian youth work grew and flourished for 14 years.

I remember being happily surprised whenever I found a senior colleague was a Christian; it was both an encouragement and a reminder that God's people are found at all levels of any institution. The consultant is, however, in a position of leadership and influence, and is inevitably watched more carefully, especially when known to be a Christian. Non-Christian colleagues may not agree with our standards but will expect us to maintain them, and will observe any lapse with a jaundiced eye. We are called to be salt and light,² to witness every day simply by being a Christian in the workplace; it is rarely remarked upon, but *always noticed*, when a person does not swear at work, because swearing is so commonplace. This simple positive act of verbal omission can be a powerful witness and may lead to interesting conversations.

The consultant surgeon became a helpful surgical mentor and is now one of my dearest friends. He demonstrated a consistent, strong, humble faith and was an excellent role model. Whatever your current training level, there will always be juniors who look up to you. This is a



glorious but heavy responsibility, especially as you become more senior; it should serve as a powerful reminder to return daily to the foot of the cross.³

At the start of my career it would not seem unusual for a surgeon to pray before an operation. It is a sad reality that nowadays criticism of such behaviour may result in potentially serious repercussions for the doctor. Whilst this may be discouraging for the young Christian doctor or student, remember that God will not be limited. My approach is to respect NHS policies, be sensitive to current societal ambivalence to religion, and pray for opportunities. These will occur, often when least expected. Pray for courage to bear witness to your faith, and wisdom to know how to do so.⁴ And be prepared for God to answer your prayers.

Surgery has been a hugely enjoyable, exhausting, exhilarating, depressing, but ultimately rewarding career. But we are placed in these positions to witness and to serve. We are privileged to deal with people who are often at their lowest ebb, physically and mentally; relatives will be worried, guilty, angry. Into this maelstrom of despair and sadness we are called to care for the suffering patient. I have witnessed a variety of behaviours at all levels of training, but the one that stands out, that is most appreciated, and achieves most, is kindness. ■

Adrian Harris is a Consultant Laparoscopic/Upper GI Surgeon at Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Huntingdon

REFERENCES

1. 'Crusaders': an independent Christian youth group started in 1900; changed its name to 'Urban Saints' in 2006. I grew up in this youth group as both boy and leader. urbansaints.org
2. Matthew 5:13-16
3. Psalm 25:9; Matthew 18:1-4, 20:16; Romans 12:3; Ephesians 4:2
4. Joshua 1:9

medical student

Katy Fischbacher
shares student
experiences

My faith shapes my experience of being a medical student on a daily basis. It is a source of great comfort and continuous correction.

It is very easy as a medical student to fall into the habit of using patients for our personal gain. We race to see the sign or do the skill forgetting the person at the centre of it. I have been challenged to cultivate an attitude not of what I have got out of the day, but what I have been able to give, remembering that Jesus came to serve, not to be served.

I think being a Christian also helps me to have a healthier attitude towards my seniors. We are called to honour and respect those above us but we do not have to be afraid of them. Great doctors can become gods in our minds and intimidating ones can make us feel we have no right to be there. Keeping God first and remembering my identity as his image bearer helps me to remember no human is superior because of their status, nor am I of less value because I am young and inexperienced.

I find one of the biggest difficulties of being a Christian medical student in a secular healthcare system is that I can't address a patient's fundamental need head on. I was particularly frustrated by this recently when I observed a 30-year-old lady being told the prognosis of her brain tumour. She broke down, screaming to her husband that she is afraid of dying. It was heart-breaking.



She was referred to a specialist counsellor, but I was left feeling that, certainly from an eternal perspective, this was wholly inadequate. But feeling limited like that also reminded me there was something I could do. We have the wonderful privilege of being able to pray for patients and therefore the ability to make a difference – mentally, physically and spiritually – after they have left the clinic.

Medical/surgical interventions are life transforming but so is prayer and I want to remember to do that more.

Additionally, since attending a CMF mini-Saline course, I've learned that we have many opportunities to share the gospel with patients and staff, and being a student gives us much more time to create these conversations.

I am frequently deeply affected by the stories of hardship and tragedy I encounter in medicine. But I have the gift of peace in circumstances where I would otherwise be questioning the purpose of life, overwhelmed by its depressing nature. Seeing suffering helps me fix my eyes on Jesus and truly rejoice in the promise that one day we will be with him and death and pain will be no more.

Finally, being a Christian means I don't have to be anxious about what comes after being a medical student. I'm naturally apprehensive of the future – will I have the time to see the people I love when working long hours? How will I cope with nights? But God is faithful – he has brought me to medical school, sustained me through it and I trust he will continue to do so. ■

Katy Fischbacher is a medical student in Cambridge