Welcome to a fortunate profession

By Dr Jon Fogarty

I would like to use this blog, the first for 2011, to welcome GPs new to the Australian landscape. On behalf of other GPs, may I say we are glad to have you join us and wish you well in a fantastic profession. Also, welcome to those GPs who trained “overseas” and are now commencing practice here. We are fortunate to have you join us. Finally, welcome to GP registrars starting training and to new interns starting in our hospitals.

For those at the beginning of their career in general practice, let me say that you are starting on a great and satisfying career.

There is a bit of moaning and groaning among GPs. We are all good at it. A friend (a GP) told me that the collective noun for a group of GPs is a ‘complaint’ of GPs. Sit with four colleagues and play moan bingo and see how you go. First moan under one minute scores two points. A complaint against bureaucrats, patients, hospitals, specialists and under-funding all score one point and five moans in under two minutes scores a bonus point. Moans against “the government” score no points and are considered to be a universal position. Try this game and then call “bingo” after five minutes at the dinner table. Explain nothing.

Despite our tendency to grizzle about it, general practice is a great profession and most of us know it. Recent research by Dr Katherine Joyce from the department of epidemiology and preventative medicine at Monash University suggests that most doctors are moderately or very satisfied with their jobs and that professional support networks are strongly associated with job satisfaction.

We have an engaging, and demanding job. We have inherited community trust from those who have gone before us.

We are well paid. We are paid about 20% less than we deserve, but so is every occupation on earth. Ask Frank Lowy how much he deserves and he would probably nominate a rise of about 20% as near the mark.

We can work part time or full time, be self-employed or work for a boss. We can work alone or in a group. We can join a kindly, loving, supportive, generous corporation if we choose to. We can become proceduralists and give anaesthetics in the bush or do skin cancer for two days each week in the city. Generally, we can take time off for maternity leave and be welcomed back with enthusiasm when we are ready to return. We can teach, do research, develop particular areas of expertise, or all of the above, if we choose to.

We are privileged to be involved in peoples’ lives at critical moments and to share their journey. We are expected to treat and to treat well. We are required to use evidence-based medicine and experience. We are entrusted to keep secrets and to be non-judgemental.

We are a fortunate profession.

As GPs, we need to support each other and to support our new colleagues. This does not imply remaining silent when a colleague is damaged, or is damaging others. This is not some Old Boys’ (or Girls’) secret society. Along with the privilege come responsibility and some stress. We all benefit when we support each other and especially support our new colleagues.

So welcome, new GPs. Enjoy. Take care.

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