

# THE TOWN MOUSE AND THE COUNTRY MOUSE

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I remember thinking 'I'm going to like it here' when, on my second day at Meadowside Surgery in Lancaster, a female patient in her eighties offered to take me for a round of golf once her hip replacement had 'settled in'. That was not the only such offer: I was added to the mailing lists of local dress shops and one lady even gave me advice about where to buy leaf tea and the work of local artists. I found a real sense of community, something that had perhaps been lacking in my previous GP placements.

The Liverpool problem-based learning course places a great deal of emphasis on community studies and primary care. Students have some exposure to general practice in four of the five years of the course, as well as spending time with the community drugs and alcohol team and having to complete a community studies project, which can look at issues as diverse as shopping facilities for single mothers in Everton to studying homelessness in the city centre. I have had GP placements in Moreton on the Wirral and, most recently, in my fourth year, spent one day a week at a busy city centre practice in Chester. Even in the fourth year, the student mainly observes clinics, leading some consultations which are supervised by the GP. My seven weeks at Meadowside as a fifth year student, however, were very different and much more enjoyable, not least because of the kindness of the staff and patients.

Three days a week were spent in the practice, followed by one in Kendal for communication skills and consolidative community studies teaching. The remaining day was timetabled for reflection, which meant writing up cases or working on our SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of an area of practice procedure and in my case incorporated a visit to a doughnut shop! I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the surgery which was mainly taken up with running my own student-led clinics. For the first time, I almost felt like a doctor, which was quite exciting. I was allowed to call my own patients into see me, do the

consultation and then suggest a treatment plan, asking the GP in at the end to check what I had done and to sign any prescriptions. I encountered a wide range of problems, and was pleasantly surprised by the stoicism of the local population, since requests for sick notes were minimal. In addition to my own clinics, I had the opportunity to do a phlebotomy clinic, to go out with the district nurses and to sit in with the practice nurse, health visitors and community psychiatric nurse.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the placement for me, however, were the home visits. Although we did go to some of the more deprived estates in Lancaster, the practice covers a large area, so we visited homes in Caton and beyond. Driving past fields and hedgerows was all very reminiscent of James Herriot and 'All Creatures Great and Small' and I kept expecting to be greeted by "mornin', veterinary" by a gum-booted farmer with a colicky cow. More often than not the patients had left their front doors open for us so that we could walk straight into their homes, a phenomenon unheard of in Liverpool and its surrounding areas. It was also interesting to witness patients being admitted to hospital by the GP, especially as I had just spent seven weeks on the wards shadowing my prospective PRHO post.

Meadowside demonstrated what it is to be a 'family doctor' in the truest sense of the term. There was a genuine sense of trust and mutual respect between doctor and patient, which is something I hope I'll be able to develop in my own practice. I look forward to coming back to Lancaster in August to take up my PRHO post and I may even chase up that game of golf, assuming her hip is all right by then of course!

*My grateful thanks to the doctors, staff and patients at Meadowside Surgery, Lancaster.*