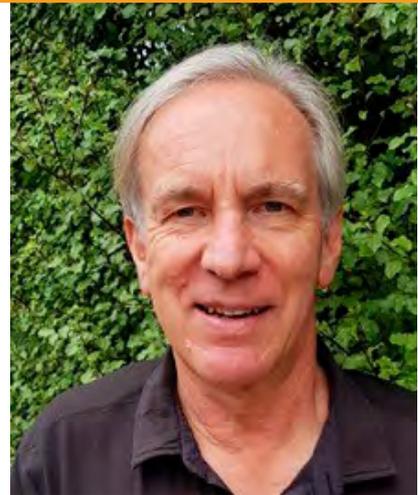


# Career spotlight: The diverse opportunities in general practice

GPs play a crucial role in the Australian healthcare system. Their important role on the frontline is evident as the world comes to terms with the impact of COVID-19. However, general practice is often a career path initially overlooked by medical students and junior doctors as they begin training in the hospital system, exposed to hospital specialties. In this series, we are introducing you to a range of GPs, highlighting the diverse and rewarding career possibilities.



Dr Steve Dunn

My father was a rural GP and though he rarely spoke about his work (and probably because he was never home), I grew up vaguely aware that being a country doctor was a profession worth pursuing. He removed unhappy appendices, performed autopsies, delivered babies, dispatched the local unwanted pets and tended to the victims of major road trauma. As a child I sensed the high community esteem that his work engendered.

After graduating from Adelaide with a traditional medical education, I was perceptive enough to be aware of multiple clinical inadequacies and so, like many of my peers, went to the NHS 'to practise on the Poms'. After two years in the UK, I returned to South Australia in the early 1980s with an anaesthetic diploma, some experience in geriatrics and a Liverpudlian wife.

Back in the region of my childhood, in the southeast of SA, I joined a large practice in Mount Gambier and spent the next 10 years in a blur, doing anaesthetics and obstetrics as well as busy general practice.

I worked alongside vastly skilled colleagues from all corners of the globe. We managed kids with meningitis, neonates requiring

pyloromyotomies (two from one evening clinic, believe it or not), obstructed labours and major trauma.

The clinic had the foresight to offer internally-funded long service leave. This was to enable a break from the relentless day-to-day demands, as well as an opportunity to upskill. And so our young family spent six months in Dunedin in New Zealand while I completed a Diploma in Industrial Health.

Consequently, when I saw the job advertisement in the *Weekend Australian* for a procedural GP to work with an international oil company in Brunei, I felt confident that this was an opportunity to practise newly-acquired skills.

The family spent five eventful years in Brunei before schooling demands brought us back. I was nominal head of the medical side of the Department of Health, Safety and Environment, gave lots of anaesthetics, delivered many Bruneian and Ghurkha infants and learnt the important Bahasa difference between kepala (head) and kelapa (coconut) while palpating pregnant abdomens. Spare time in those years enabled me to explore the nascent field of distance education and I was able to complete a Diploma in Asian

Studies, together with Masters degrees in Family Medicine and GP Psychiatry, from Monash. Communicating via fax seemed very exciting!

I was offered a job with the Australian Embassy in Dili but a flare in the civil war in East Timor dissuaded me from pursuing it, to the undisguised relief of the family.

Instead, I returned once more to my former general practice in Mount Gambier. The academic basis of the masters degree strengthened an interest in medical education, which led to a role with the local GP training organisation as the regional medical educator. This was an interesting balance to ongoing general practice and procedural obstetrics.

An opportunity to improve governance skills via the Australian Institute of Company Directors supported subsequent leadership roles in the Divisions of General Practice, as well as many other associated boards and workforce associations. This continues in present times with a committee role with the Professional Services Review Board.

When the local fly-in botox service to our town ceased, I saw this as another

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opportunity to supplement my medical practice. My Thursday night practice at a local beauty salon offered a valuable insight into the cosmetic interests of my patients and after volunteering as a guinea pig during one of our training sessions, my earlier prejudices about the effect of facial fillers was challenged!

I have now ceased clinical medicine, apart from a role as medical support for a private charter travel company. The long-standing interest in medical education is satisfied by a part-time

role with a GP training organisation, as well as continuing a 15-year role as an examiner with RANZCOG.

Opportunities still tantalisingly beckon. A grant has enabled me to complete a medical editing course from the University of Chicago. This is a new direction, yet to be developed!

Broad-based general practice has given me a varied and fulfilling professional life. Taking some opportunities to develop new skills has offered me new and interesting activities, often with

unforeseen results. For those who are currently unable to 'feel the passion', I would say, "Don't worry". Grab any opportunity to upskill and see where that leads. It is a wonderful profession.

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