

Author: Dr Jennifer Yates

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Do you remember the day that your life stopped on a pin? I do, it was the day that I woke up and I was blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. It was the day that I called in sick for my ED shift, called my husband to come home from work and the day my neurologist told me “We have to call this MS now”.

All told, I was out of work for about 4 months while I started treatment and recovered. Prior to this, I had just got married, passed my membership exams and was planning to apply for the paediatric HST. When I was ready to return to work, I was fortunate to secure a position as a specialist clinical lecturer. I remained in this post for 4 years which gave me the breathing space to consider, “What next?”

This may seem like a straightforward question however medicine consists of long, irregular hours and a certain amount of ‘on-call’ time. None of these factors mix well with my MS. They lead to increased fatigue and increased physiological stress. My choices going forward seemed to be

- i) Continue with my original plan but know it would likely affect my health,
- ii) Consider a different speciality (trickier as all my training to date was in paediatrics)
- iii) Leave medicine entirely.

When I transitioned back into work after my initial relapses, I was linked to occupational health and found their advice and support invaluable. This proved to be pivotal for me, as it gave me, my new direction. I am now in my first year of the occupational medicine HST. I have been supported to complete my training at a reduced rate so that I can work and train while managing my MS.

I have decided to share my story in the hopes that it will spark a conversation about working/training with a chronic illness or a disability. While I was dealing with my diagnosis I didn’t know any other trainees who had similar issues and it was quite isolating at times. We plan to set up an informal group for doctors with chronic illness/disabilities as a safe space to connect with other trainees with chronic illness/disabilities.

I have MS, I have a disability and I am ‘well able’ to work in medicine.