



London, UK

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2022;377:o1134
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o1134>
 Published: 17 May 2022

Why I . . . embroider

Paediatrician Emma Dyer talks to **Helen Jones** about her passion for embroidery

Helen Jones

Doing embroidery is a good way of switching off from the stresses of work, says Emma Dyer, a registrar in paediatric emergency medicine at University Hospital Lewisham in south London.

“I find it’s good for my mental health because it uses another part of my brain and different skills from work,” she says. “Although I do the odd bit of suturing in emergency medicine, it’s very different from embroidery.”

Dyer started out doing simple cross stitch embroidery as a young girl. “My mum taught me,” she says. “She is amazing at sewing—she even made my wedding dress.”

Last year, Dyer embarked on a particularly ambitious project—a “stitch journal” documenting a year through embroidery to produce a diary in thread featuring a small, stitched image to represent every day of the year.

“During the pandemic, lots of people did it and posted the results online. Some of them are very beautiful, so I decided to give it a go,” she says. Her stitch journal includes everything from a tiny stethoscope and face mask, to glasses of wine, a barbeque, and a cricket bat.

“I tried to think of something positive or important that represented each day. There are lots of work related symbols, such as my booster vaccination and a negative covid test, but also personal things too,” she explains. “I didn’t have time to stitch something every day, but I would jot down an idea or two and when I had time I would do a few of them together.”

Embroidery is an inexpensive and portable hobby, she says. “You don’t need much to get started, just some fabric, thread, and a needle, so it’s quite cheap and you can do it anywhere. I’ve embroidered on trains and ferries, and on holiday all over the world.”

And it’s also relatively easy to pick up. “People often think that embroidery looks complicated, but it isn’t. It is quite straightforward,” she says. “Anyone could do it—especially something simple like cross stitch—it’s just about following a pattern, usually on a special kind of fabric with a grid of holes in it.”

Although Dyer is not part of a formal crafting group, she has found some of her colleagues are also embroiderers. “A few nurses I work with are big cross stitchers—it’s good to find that we have a shared interest outside of work,” she says.

Having completed her stitch journal, Dyer is now working on a patchwork playmat for her sister’s soon-to-be-born baby. “I’m desperately trying to finish it before the baby arrives,” she says. “I do a lot of patchwork and quilting and make things with straight lines such as curtains and cushions, but I’m now trying to branch out and make clothes for myself.”

How to get started

- Start with a kit that comes complete with fabric, a pattern, thread, and instructions. Cross stitch is the easiest technique to master, and you can buy kits online on platforms such as Etsy and in craft and hobby shops
- YouTube has lots of tutorials to help get you started. “It’s much easier watching someone doing the stitches rather than trying to work it out from written instructions,” says Dyer
- Facebook and Pinterest are great places to get ideas for projects
- Start small. “Don’t be too ambitious, that way you’ll complete the project and it will give you the confidence to move onto bigger things,” she says