ROLE MODEL

Amit Arora

The consultant geriatrician talks to Kathy Oxtoby about his love of teaching trainees and how he is drawn to innovation.

It’s not just the complex nature of his work that satisfies consultant geriatrician Amit Arora, it’s also about introducing simple but transformative measures that benefit patients.

“Optimising their medicines or making sure they have the right sized walking stick—these things can make a huge difference to patients’ lives,” he says. He calls his work at University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust “a huge privilege.”

And not only that, as his career has diversified beyond clinical practice—his current roles include vice president (workforce) for the British Geriatrics Society and regional clinical director for the Emergency Care Improvement Support Team at NHS England and NHS Improvement—he has found work has brought him more rewards.

“I can have a positive impact and influence on patient care, not only for those in front of me, but at a regional, national, even international level,” he says.

Arora particularly enjoys sharing the knowledge he has acquired with trainees. “Teaching is an important part of being a doctor—this is how we pass on the centuries of experience and skills involved in medicine to the doctors of the future.

“But while this tradition of teaching trainees is valuable, it has to be a two way thing—the teacher has to teach gracefully and the learner has to learn gratefully. That’s when teaching works well.”

His love of teaching and medicine began with his parents, who taught him “the value of good education and pursuing a career you genuinely enjoy.” He says it is important to have “sound advice and enthusiasm,” which he gets from his wife and children.

Arora grew up in India where he did his medical training in Jaipur and then at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. “Then, as I was nearing the end of my senior registrar training, I started looking for opportunities overseas and came to the UK in 1996.”

After three years as a senior house officer and equivalent roles at West Wales General Hospital, Carmarthen, and having taken his Membership of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom examination, he successfully applied for a registrar training post in geriatric medicine in the West Midlands, and has been there ever since.

His choice of specialty was inspired by his consultant mentors. “Having seen their work with patients, the transition to geriatrics felt very natural,” he says.

As well as influencing his choice of specialty, he says the “many role models” he has come across during his career have taught him about clinical medicine, leadership, and “the importance of collaboration.” He has tried to be a similar role model to trainees. “I’m always available to speak with staff, whether it’s in my office, in a corridor, or on a ward round.”

Throughout his career Arora has been “drawn to some element of healthcare innovation,” which has led him to become a member of numerous national committees, advisory bodies, and working groups for NHS England, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, the National Institute for Health and Care Research, and the Department of Health and Social Care.

He is the clinical lead for the National Institute for Health and Care Research ageing clinical network for West Midlands, has contributed to national and international policy on the ageing population, and is the founding director of the National Frailty Academy, which provides free training to health and social care staff.

Recognising the harms of inappropriate bed rest in older people, in 2016 he described deconditioning as a clinical syndrome and launched a national deconditioning awareness and prevention campaign: “Sit up, Get Dressed and Keep Moving!” which has been adopted by many hospitals (www.bgs.org.uk). Building on this work, he is leading a reconditioning campaign—#ReconditionTheNation—shifting the focus from simply avoiding deconditioning to promoting activity in general, particularly among the elderly.

In 2020, he won a Royal College of Physicians award for his contribution to the profession.

“Work hard, be kind, and don’t be afraid of doing the right thing,” is his advice to new doctors. And he will continue to take the advice he was given by a 106 year old patient, which has stayed with him. “She told me the secret of her long, healthy life was to have a purpose. Mine is caring for older people—which is an honour.”

Kathy Oxtoby, London

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To nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, job title, and the reason for your nomination to awaters@bmj.com

NOMINATE A ROLE MODEL

NOMINATED BY AYLA KHAN

“I’ve had the pleasure of knowing Amit Arora for the past 10 years, and he’s a shining example of professionalism. He always goes the extra mile in supporting staff and in ensuring his patients are well cared for.

“His vast knowledge and expertise are recognised and acknowledged by patients and colleagues alike, and his extensive contributions to geriatric medicine outside direct clinical work have served to enhance and progress elderly care quality and policy at a national level.

“His career is one full of achievement and excellence. In particular, his advocacy on deconditioning awareness and prevention is a source of inspiration for us all. Thank you, Dr Arora for all your invaluable support, and for making a difference.”

Ayla Khan is an SAS geriatric doctor at the Royal Stoke Hospital, Stoke-on-Trent.

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