



CAREERS

Role model: Ian Morrison

The consultant in paediatric emergency medicine talks to **Jacqui Wise** about the importance of listening

Jacqui Wise

London, UK

Despite working in a busy department at the Royal London Hospital, Ian Morrison thinks it is important to talk, and really listen, to his colleagues.

“A lot of the time—and not just in medicine—people are very time pressured,” he says. “Sometimes it’s important to ask, ‘Are you okay? Do you need a cup of coffee? Do you need to talk?’”

Softly spoken, Morrison emphasises the importance of asking open questions and giving people time to talk about what is worrying them, whether it’s work related or not. “Often, letting them talk and reassuring them that it will be okay is all that’s needed. Sometimes, for example with trainees, I can offer practical advice.”

Morrison grew up in Northern Ireland and graduated from Queen’s University Belfast in 1993. One of his early mentors was Michael Callender, a senior consultant physician at Belfast’s Royal Victoria Hospital. “He took the time to write a very kind, supportive, and meaningful letter to me when I passed my finals,” Morrison says. “He gave me early, valuable advice to believe in myself.”

Another mentor was Graeme Snodgrass, a consultant paediatrician who was close to retirement when Morrison was in his first registrar job at the Royal London. “He had a positive way of encouraging you to push yourself but making sure you always felt safe.”

When Morrison took on his first managerial job as clinical lead for the emergency department at the Royal London Hospital, consultant gynaecologist Trevor Beedham was incredibly supportive. “Sometimes I just went to his office and talked nonsense, but you always felt he had your back,” Morrison says.

What these three figures had in common was that they would listen and they wouldn’t judge, says Morrison. And this is something he tries to emulate with people in his own department. “I think this has been lost a bit,” he says. “Hospital structures have changed. Now everything seems a little bit more dog eat dog. In the past it was gentler and managerial interactions were a little bit kinder.”

A consultant for 17 years, Morrison says he is noticing more stress at work. “This may be because of the volume of work that people have to deal with, sometimes without the correct resources,” he says.

“Another problem is that doctors tend to be perfectionists—which is good for patient care but is not always

good for them.” For example, trainees seem to get concerned when reading any feedback that is remotely negative, Morrison says. “A lot of the time I just help to provide context so they can see that the feedback is designed to help.”

Morrison says that senior doctors need to be vigilant about spotting changes in their colleagues—for example if someone has suddenly become quiet—and check whether they are okay. It’s also important to be proactive and offer a chance to talk if there has been a challenging case, complaint, or even a death. His department has set up regular wellbeing modules and employs a psychologist to give support to doctors, nurses, and all staff.

In 2016, Morrison took a sabbatical because he felt he had run out of steam. During that year he qualified for the world triathlon championships in Mexico and represented Great Britain for his age group. “Having that year out of medicine—walking the dog and riding my bike—allowed me to think a lot more clearly,” he says. “Since I have gone back, I think I have become better at helping people deal with their problems.”

It’s important for doctors to find the time to relax and reset, he says. “I find walking the dog is really helpful—the dog doesn’t ask you any questions.”

Nominated by Tessa Davis and Anna Dobbie

Ian is a role model in the truest sense of the word. He seeks no awards or recognition, but day to day he helps his colleagues and patients in challenging situations. Whether the problem is personal, clinical, or managerial, Ian is always there to support his peers and his patients.

No one else offers the same level of mentorship and guidance. He takes the time to understand each person, listen to them, and make them feel valued.

During his time at the Royal London he has held various managerial positions including being clinical lead and a college tutor and, through these roles, he has formally mentored many doctors in difficulty who have benefited from his approachable manner and unparalleled knowledge. But his biggest supporters are those countless doctors who he has given more informal guidance to. He has shaped many a doctor’s career by providing an open door, a cup of coffee, and sensible advice.

Tessa Davis is a consultant in paediatric emergency medicine at the Royal London Hospital, and a senior lecturer at Queen Mary University of London. Anna Dobbie is a consultant in emergency medicine at the Royal London Hospital.

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 arimmer@bmj.com

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>

