CAREERS

Paul Williams: improving workplaces for long term benefits

The occupational medicine expert tells **Adrian O'Dowd** about how medical training can open up a world of opportunities

Adrian O'Dowd

London, UK

Early days

As a child I was into science and addicted to the TV programme *Tomorrow's World*. I narrowed my career options down to being an astronaut or a doctor. Astronaut seemed less likely—there are fewer opportunities.

The human touch

When I was a student I didn't have much money and I worked as a door-to-door potato salesman in quite a deprived area of Leeds. I learnt a lot about interacting with people in their own homes. Then I did community paediatrics and became interested in the social determinants of health and how people's location and occupation drove health outcomes. General practice seemed a natural fit.

Forensic medicine

Forensic medicine is about providing mental and physical healthcare for people detained in police custody. I got involved with Leicestershire Police because our senior partner in the GP practice was a police surgeon and sometimes they were short of people. I became interested and did a diploma in medical jurisprudence.

The bigger picture

When I was a medical student, a big part of the course was occupational medicine. It sparked my interest and because I'd had a few different jobs I was interested in how work affected people. When I was a GP, I went part time, which gave me a chance to enrol in a diploma course in occupational medicine.

Culture change

My first part time, and then full time, work in occupational medicine was with Derbyshire Police. I wanted a full range of experience, so when a post at Jaguar Land Rover became available, I went for that. It was a huge culture change. I learnt about manufacturing and how private businesses work. The focus on efficiency meant that I helped people who did repetitive jobs to work in a way that was safe and time efficient.

Clinical meets manufacturing

At Jaguar, and then at JC Bamford Excavators (JCB) where I worked later, I had the wonderful combination of one-to-one clinical work along with ill health prevention work at the plant. I could also use my medical skills to work with engineers, designers, and managers to make improvements. While at JCB, I was involved in reducing the number of incidents leading to illness and injuries, which was hugely satisfying.

Long term improvements

Occupational medicine benefits people by giving them a better working environment, which leads to long term health improvements and less ill health. It's also beneficial for the company because they get to recruit and retain good people.

Large scale work

In 2015 I joined Maximus, who provide occupational health support, among other things, to a wide range of clients. I am now divisional president of Maximus UK, which was a daunting role to take on but tremendously exciting because I stepped out of a clinical role and now I lead a business.

Presidential time

I am the immediate past president of the Society of Occupational Medicine. During my time there, we were able to grow and bring in a more multidisciplinary membership.

Outside work life

I am hopelessly addicted to Leeds United Football Club in a way that is completely unhealthy. I also like trying to stay fit, so cycling is my thing. Two of my children are training to be doctors now.

Lessons learnt

I often meet doctors who are unhappy in their role. Medicine can be demanding as well as rewarding, but some don't realise how much potential they have to change and refresh their career while still using all their skills as a doctor—both within medicine

and beyond. There is such an opportunity for lifelong learning and taking a sideways step to refresh.

Curriculum vitae:

2018 to present: UK division president, Maximus UK

2017-2018: Managing director, UK health services, Maximus

2015-2016: Chief medical officer, Maximus

2012-2016: Assistant editor of *Occupational Medicine*

2007-2015: Medical director and director of health and safety, JC Bamford Excavators

2005-2007: Occupational health manager, Jaguar Land Rover

2002: Diploma in Occupational Medicine

2001-2005: Occupational physician, Derbyshire

2000: Diploma in Medical Jurisprudence

1993-2004: Forensic physician, Leicestershire Police; and, later, lead physician for the Constabulary, also working for New Scotland Yard and Special Branch on specific projects

1992-2001: Principal, general practice, Leicester

1987: Bachelor of Medicine, University of Leeds