



## CAREERS

## Role model: Wai Yoong

The consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist tells **Adrian O'Dowd** that an understanding of human factors is crucial for becoming a good doctor

### Adrian O'Dowd

London, UK

Wai Yoong is a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust in London, and is much admired in his field.

But he admits he wasn't exactly a star pupil at medical school, having not chosen a career in medicine for himself. "As a student I didn't particularly shine as I was ambivalent about medicine," he says.

Originally from Malaysia, Yoong moved to a boarding school in Coleraine, Northern Ireland, at the age of 15 while his family remained at home. "Where I come from, most parents prefer their kids to become professionals, so mine were keen for me to be a doctor," he says. "I only really became interested in medicine after I qualified. Looking back, my parents made the right choice for me because now I love what I do and wouldn't think of any other vocation."

Yoong qualified from Queen's University in Belfast in 1987 and then moved to Birmingham for his general obstetrics and gynaecological training. He has been in his current consultant post in London for 18 years but has also travelled a lot, running obstetric haemorrhage workshops with international colleagues.

"What I learnt from travelling was to appreciate what we have in the UK," he says. "All of us moan about the NHS—that we don't get enough money and that the equipment is old—but when I went to Ethiopia and Uganda, I found people make do with what they have."

Yoong is also interested in human factors—the science of why people behave the way they do and how to avoid making errors. He currently leads a team of clinicians, in partnership with

British Airways Flight Training, to deliver a human factors training course using flight simulators to reduce medical errors.

"Doctors are not infallible. Sometimes the best doctors can unintentionally make the worst mistakes," he says. "These errors are often multifactorial and I stress to my juniors that you have to learn from them, forgive yourselves, share your experiences, and move on."

Yoong believes passionately in the importance of helping junior colleagues when they seek advice or support. "If I see someone with a spark, then I will go all out to help them," he explains. "The person I am most interested in helping is someone who is driven and motivated but sometimes just needs a nudge in the right direction."

His advice for doctors starting out is simple. "You need to persevere and grab opportunities when they present themselves but, at the same time, adapt to a constantly changing healthcare landscape," he says. "As I get older, I've come to the realisation that medicine is a marathon and not a sprint."

#### Nominated by Wasim Lodhi

"Wai Yoong is one of those consultants who will go out of their way to help their juniors. Even when he's not on-call he'll be there to support them.

"He is loved by his colleagues for his selfless nature and he proactively engages everyone, from students to consultant colleagues, to get involved in various courses, workshops, and teaching activities.

"He mentors those who need it and he would never mention that he came in to work on a day off, or stayed beyond his working hours, to support a junior colleague."

Wasim Lodhi is a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at North Middlesex University Hospital, London