CAREERS

Role model: Shriti Pattani

The GP and clinical director tells **Adrian O'Dowd** how understanding the impact her patients' work has on their physical and mental health has helped her to provide better care

Adrian O'Dowd

London, UK

Occupational health and general practice have many common threads, because they are both about people and their everyday lives, says Shriti Pattani, a GP and clinical director in the occupational health department at London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust.

Pattani's family were forced to leave Uganda in 1972 when she was five years old. She soon adapted to life in the UK and remembers accompanying her non-English-speaking grandparents to their GP practice, where she was bitten by the medicine bug. "In those days, coming from an immigrant family, I hadn't expected to enter higher education. When I was about 12 or 13, I thought 'Why can't I be ambitious and be a doctor?'" she says. "That was the beginning of it for me and I never wavered from that."

Pattani qualified from the University of Leicester in 1991 and worked at the Leicester Royal Infirmary before settling into general practice. "Having done four years of hospital medicine, I felt it was time to follow my passion—primary care. It gave me the opportunity to provide holistic, long term care for patients and families and see the results."

Her GP trainer made weekly visits to the Weetabix factory in Northampton to look after the staff and give the employer advice on work and health related matters. "On a few occasions I went with him, and that was my first exposure to occupational health," she explains.

Pattani said this led her to consciously acknowledge the impact that work could have on her patients' mental and physical health, as well as their identity and self worth.

"While many of our patients spend a significant amount of time at work, we are often unaware of what their work involves and the impact it can have on their health," she says, "A patient may present with a condition, but how do we know its connection with their work unless we ask?"

After starting as a GP in 1995, Pattani moved to London to achieve her vision of being both a GP and an occupational

physician. "I fell into a training programme to become a specialist in occupational medicine at the Royal Free Hospital in London which, five years later, led to a role as a consultant while also working part time as a GP."

Pattani now splits her time, spending around 80% in occupational health, 15% in general practice, and 5% on other roles. "One of the things I do is chair the NHS Health at Work Network, which represents 120 occupational health services across England. We advise government organisations and public sector bodies."

Pattani also has a passion for teaching and training and she is director of the diploma course in occupational medicine for the Royal Society for Public Health.

"Occupational health is a growing speciality, with many opportunities to work in the public and private sectors, including teaching, training, and research roles," she says. "It's a great career to have in medicine."

Nominated by David McLoughlin, president of the Society of Occupational Medicine

Shriti has been a champion for the NHS to take workplace health seriously, leading the NHS Health at Work Network.

The Society of Occupational Medicine sees her as a role model in demonstrating how the NHS as an employer can play an important role in helping their staff to maintain good health, and demonstrating how occupational health services can prevent work related ill health, promote good health, and manage health conditions and rehabilitation.

Shriti has also worked with us as an advocate to government, encouraging the provision of occupational health services for all the working age population.

Nominate a role model: 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

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