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## Why I . . . play the French horn

Consultant respiratory physician Frank Edenborough speaks to **Francesca Robinson** about a musical passion he has had since the age of 12

Francesca Robinson

“I’m a firm believer that those of us who work in really stressful jobs need to have some outlet or passion outside medicine,” says Frank Edenborough.

Edenborough, who runs the Sheffield Teaching Hospitals cystic fibrosis service, plays the French horn in several amateur orchestras and ensembles, devoting around 20 weekends a year to music.

“It allows my brain to switch from medicine to doing something completely different,” he says. “When I’m playing and have a conductor standing in front of me waving his baton, I’m not thinking about what’s happened during the day, I just crack on with the music.”

Edenborough became mesmerised by the French horn as a child while at a concert with his father. “There was this big bank of shiny instruments making a lot of noise and that was the French horn,” he recalls. “I wanted one.”

He took lessons at school, played in orchestras at medical school, and has continued playing in local amateur orchestras throughout his career, wherever his job has taken him.

He is currently principal horn and recent past chairman of the Sheffield Philharmonic Orchestra, plays third horn in the Hallam Orchestra, and also plays in the European Doctors Orchestra and the Scottish Vienna Horn Society.

“I’ve achieved the level of playing I’m at by sheer hard work and bloody mindedness, driven by the fear of not wanting to make a twit of myself in the orchestra,” he says. “I often play the first horn which means I lead that section and play solos, so I can’t afford to get it wrong.

“For me, there is almost nothing more exciting than setting off, with my horn on my back, to travel to Scotland, Austria, or some other European city to catch up with friends and make music.”

Edenborough also says that playing music makes him a better doctor. “It relaxes my brain and helps me to return to work feeling refreshed,” he says.

“It’s also about being part of a team. The horn section of the orchestra is usually small, so you get to know your fellow players very well. You’re also part of the much wider team of the orchestra, and you must be willing both to lead as a soloist and to follow because the conductor is in charge.

“This helps me with team building in my day-to-day work in cystic fibrosis. We only function well with a strong multidisciplinary team of clinicians all working together to look after the patient.”

In awe of the standards that professional musicians can achieve, Edenborough sometimes wonders whether he should have chosen music as a career. “I think I’ve done it the best way round—medicine has been a very fulfilling career and it pays much better than being a musician,” he says. “I play music for fun and I’m a much better doctor than I would ever have been a professional horn player.”

### How to keep up your playing

- Any music group is a wonderful antidote to the rigours of medicine
- Try to keep your standard up by private practice
- On-call rotas make commitments such as rehearsals difficult—talk to the group leader about planned absences and offer to find someone to cover your part
- Consider joining like minded medical musicians through organisations such as the European Medical Student Orchestra, the European Doctors Orchestra, or World Doctors Orchestra
- Joining these organisations can also lead to new friendships, travel to new places, and opportunities to play at a high standard.