Serving the community: the returning GP

Retired GP Venu Prasad tells Adrian O’Dowd why he is happy to continue working as a locum after almost 30 years in full time employment

Adrian O’Dowd

After almost 30 years working as a GP in a small practice in north Wales, Venu Prasad could be forgiven for looking forward to a peaceful retirement—but that’s not the sort of doctor he is.

Prasad now works three days a week as a GP locum at different practices. He is happy to be back working after a short spell in retirement during which he did voluntary work for groups such as the British Red Cross, as a bereavement counsellor, and for a charity that helps children with reading.

“Although I enjoyed volunteer work and spending more time with my family and our dog, I still felt that I had that enthusiasm for my job,” he says, explaining his return to general practice. “I went through the refresher course and a placement and came back into the workforce in 2020 as a locum. By making myself available regularly on a weekly basis, I am providing continuity of care, even though I’m a locum doctor.”

The 70 year old, who was awarded an MBE in 2018, qualified in 1974 from the University of Kerala in India, but soon made the move to the UK for job opportunities.

“After qualifying I was looking for work in India but unfortunately—and it’s still true now—there was an over-production of doctors,” he explains. “I was finding it difficult to get a job. One of the problems was that it wasn’t your qualification that mattered, it was who you knew and, sadly, who you could bribe. That was not an avenue I was prepared to go down.”

After moving to the UK and initially deciding to specialise in oncology, Prasad decided to switch his focus to general practice, saying, “I realised after talking to colleagues and consultants I worked with at that time—the 1980s—that once you reached a certain stage, you could not go upwards, especially if you were from abroad.

“Sadly, it was difficult for Asian graduates or any graduates from outside the UK to go up the ladder. I hit a brick wall so I looked into other avenues. I didn’t know much about general practice at that time, so I did some research and met a few local GPs.

“It appealed to me and I decided to give it a go. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. I am a people person and like human interaction and the continuity of care you get in general practice.”

He secured a principal GP position at a small practice in north Wales in 1988, where he continued working for the next 29 years.

“It was a small town and a small practice, and it took time for me to get to know the patients and for them to get to know me. But gradually, over a period of time, you establish that wonderful relationship and patients trust you,” he says.

Prasad also became a GP appraiser with Cardiff University, allowing him to meet and help clinical colleagues regularly over the course of almost 10 years in the role.

To younger doctors, he says, “It is not an easy profession and it has its difficulties—but if you work hard and you’re focused, then you have this great ability to be able to serve your patients and community. Do it well, to the best of your ability, and be prepared to learn from your mistakes.”

Prasad says he is blessed, adding, “We all have our ups and downs, but my journey has been absolutely wonderful and I have no complaints. There is no other healthcare system in the world that comes anywhere near the NHS. It is the best.”

Nominated by Tom Partridge

“Venu joined my practice in January 2020 just before the pandemic. He had retired from clinical practice and needed to go through the GP returner scheme to get reaccredited. He was my supervisor.

“Venu doesn’t look for any external validation, but he is the absolute best of GPs and the NHS. He was a massive help to us through the early stages of the pandemic—adaptable and clinically great, but above all, he puts the patient at the heart of everything he does. He makes you a better doctor for working with him, and a better person for knowing him.”

Thomas Partridge is a GP in Upton, Merseyside