



The Royal College of Radiologists

## How I ended up in Clinical Oncology research

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I was on the point of quitting medicine for a career in music when a BMJ Careers article highlighted the merits of Clinical Oncology. The next day, I applied for an SHO post at the Royal Marsden and have never looked back.

I enjoyed the structured training programme of Clinical Oncology, dare I say it the exams, the evidence-based approach, and the opportunity to make a difference to cancer management through recruiting to clinical trials. I was fortunate enough very early on in my time at the Marsden to work with John Yarnold. He was, and remains, very generous to junior members of the team, teaching us how to identify important research questions and how best to answer them. At the outset of my training I didn't plan to undertake a research degree but, a couple of years later after bumping into John again at a European conference, I successfully applied for an RCR Fellowship to fund an MD(Res) in breast radiotherapy under his supervision. I really enjoyed my research degree, the time to read papers and explore potential research questions in depth, the time to discuss ideas with others and the time to write papers. I also enjoyed having more control over how I spent my days, even squeezing in a training course at English National Opera in order to put to bed any further notions of becoming a singer.

Having undertaken my MD(Res) post-CCT, I then went straight into a consultant post and this is the point at which, unless you apply for a post with specific academic sessions, it can be very challenging keeping up a research portfolio. If I was advising someone considering a pure NHS-funded consultant post and hoping to maintain a research career now, I would suggest that you should insist upfront on research PAs in your job plan because the NHS work is only going to increase. Alternatively, ruthlessly ring-fence time to write a successful grant application to fund a brilliant research fellow. Here, I was blessed to get NIHR Research for Patient Benefit funding for Freddie Bartlett to run the HeartSpare studies and it is the impact of this set of studies coupled with the fun of working with a fabulous multidisciplinary team that has kept me going in the trickier times. I also have some fantastic colleagues at a similar career stage and facing similar challenges that make me laugh even on the most rubbish of days.

Some bits of advice that I have most valued in my career so far are that 1) research should be enjoyable (if it isn't, aside from the fact that not everything goes to plan,

something's wrong!) and 2) you can't fit 150 litres into a 100 litre suitcase (ie you have to say "no" to things in order to focus on what you really want to achieve, whether that's changing practice in radiotherapy, raising a family, or singing Handel arias of an evening). From a research perspective, I will keep going for as long as I feel I'm making a difference to our patients and, as John Yarnold says, putting one more brick in the wall. In essence, clinical oncology research is a very satisfying career but you'll need to be tenacious. Good luck and enjoy!