

A balanced life

There are three important steps you must take to make a smooth transition between Medicine and the rest of your life. You need to **decide, organise and accomplish**.

First, **decide** what you want for your life after Medicine. Do you already know what your goals are for a fulfilled and happy life after Medicine, or are you only thinking about leaving behind the stress of the medical workload? Until you know what you want rather than what you don't want, it will be difficult to move forward positively in your life.

Pulsepoints

Setting clear goals about your desired life after Medicine is essential. Although you may say that you want the transition to be a smooth one, so that you hardly notice any negative effects of leaving the medical profession behind, have you identified clearly what that actually means for you?

Prescription

In order to discover what having a perfect transition from Medicine means to you, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you believe you can deal emotionally and physically with the change that you are considering?
- Do you dread leaving Medicine so much that you might decide to carry on doing your own locum?
- Do you worry that work has filled your days, months and years so completely that you hardly have any other interests?
- Are you afraid of being bored?
- Do you lack the confidence to get yourself to the place where you can do what you want?

You have had a fairly structured life for years, even allowing for the unexpected emergencies. You know the way things are organised for medical work – the clinics, surgeries and on-call duties – and even though there were emergencies to deal with, there was still a routine and a certain predictability. You had an expectation of how your days would be filled, and even though there were varying workloads and you knew they would generally be large, you usually knew what might happen within that work context.

Then from one day to the next your agenda changes and you want to:

- read all the books which have been piling up, waiting for when you have some spare time, because it would be wonderful to read on a regular basis, maybe join a readers' group and discuss your opinions about the various books
- see your children, grandchildren or other relatives more often because they want to get to know you better
- be able to go to the cinema each week, and see all the latest films as they are released instead of on television several years later
- get fitter by walking more, running or swimming regularly, joining a yoga class or playing golf
- get your photos sorted out before you become too old to remember when and where they were taken
- start a business
- upgrade your computer skills
- learn a new language.

There will no longer be any excuses because when you are very clear about your desired outcome, you will find it easy to make big steps into your desired life after Medicine.

As you plan for your new phase of life, you may be feeling a bit wobbly, because you are fed up with the lack of balance in your life and you have told yourself that enough is enough.

Years of trying to be all things to all people may have seemed rather like trying to balance a beam horizontally on a fulcrum, when it naturally wants to tip either one way or the other. When this happens, you may feel overwhelmed by all the things there are to do one day, and then too lazy to do anything at all at other times. That's what it's like being a doctor, and when you leave you no longer have to keep to a tight schedule – day in, day out – while at the same time dealing with emergencies and other responsibilities. Over the years this lack of balance amounts to not much of a life if it continues week in, week out and you never get to do all the exciting things you've been promising yourself you would do one day. Not only is it not much of a life, but it is not good for your personal, emotional and physical health and well-being, or for your personal relationships.

After she left Medicine, Dr Stone thought that she should do her housework in order to save money, as she was earning less. However, she found it so stressful and boring that eventually she decided it was worth the cost of employing a cleaner to relieve her stress.

Keep in your mind the picture of the beam balanced on a fulcrum as you become more aware of when it tips too much to one side or the other, and thus your need to do something to get it back to some kind of equilibrium if you want your life to be more balanced, with your needs addressed.

Pulsepoints

Watch carefully to see whether your life keeps becoming out of balance by falling towards the needs and demands of your partner, friends or family, and rarely falling to the side of what you want to do. It is likely to do this if you don't address your own needs for health and well-being by being clear and asking for what you actually want – hence the importance of goal setting. It's so simple to keep on doing what you have always done. Perhaps you complain and groan but then carry on as before. It's easier to strike a balance when you recognise what it is that is pulling you one way, and compare this with what is pulling you the other way.

Prescription

- Make a list of five things which pull you away from the life you want.
- List five things which would push you towards a more balanced life.
- Draw pictures of a beam or a see-saw sloping down one way, sloping down the other, and horizontal. Note on each diagram what pushes you out of balance one way or the other.
- Decide how friends, family, partner and community affect your life balance.

Pulsepoints

To work out your strategy for change, make sure that you express your desired outcome in positive terms, rather than by saying what you don't want.

Prescription

Create some affirmations which express what you want to achieve as if you have already achieved it. For example, instead of saying 'I wish I had a better life than this', you could say 'I have a wonderful life. I have plenty of time to do all the things I want to do.'

You have to decide what your perfect life after Medicine would be for you, and be really clear about what it would look like, sound like and feel like, so that you can live it.

Dr Leaf knew that he wanted to be a professional photographer when he stopped working as a doctor. At first he found the change of lifestyle very challenging, but he was willing to try visualisation. He gradually mastered the technique, which is rather like daydreaming. He could imagine himself lying on his front taking wonderful pictures on wildlife safaris, he heard people praising his dramatic photos, and he felt the thrill of making a success of this new career. Doing this motivated him to take a course in professional photography and explore ways to take his desired new life forward. This included remaining very focused and not being distracted from his aim by his friends and family doubting his ability to make a success of this new venture by telling him that he shouldn't have left Medicine.

Pulsepoints

When these things are clear and you see yourself as you would like to be in your life after Medicine, you will be ready to move towards creating that life.

If you write down your goals you are more likely to succeed.

Prescription

For each goal, write down three smaller steps that you will need to take to reach it. In your diary, note the steps and when you will make time to do them. Write your goals for the next three months and the dates by when you want to achieve them.

Secondly, **organise** your time more effectively by defining the various 'compartments' of your day and of your life. For example, you may have parts of your day which are used for:

- domestic tasks
- hobbies
- keeping fit
- your children

- your partner
- your friends and family
- the community
- spiritual connection.

Pulsepoints

Think about what you are planning for your life after Medicine and how to make it more balanced than it was when you were a doctor, even though you may not have been very good at doing this in the past.

Prescription

- List all the tasks that you don't enjoy and decide what to delegate.
- Decide which of these habits don't actually have to be done at all.
- Devise strategies for doing things more efficiently.
- Let go of checking and re-checking and trust your ability to do a good job first time around.

Finally, **accomplish** and achieve whatever you have decided is your desired outcome and the steps you will take. The next thing is to take that first step. It sounds easy, doesn't it? If you have done this before but got stuck, this may be because the first step you thought of was too big.

Dr Flower wanted to travel when he left Medicine. He decided to apply to be a medical officer with a company that organised charity treks in Namibia. The first step was to contact the company and request an application form. The second step was to fill in the form and send it off. The third step was to attend an interview. The step before the first step was to contact the person already doing the job and find out the pros and cons of doing the job so that he could make an informed decision about it.

Do you have a problem related to the way you manage time? Whether you like it or not, time is the currency that you need for making the changes you want. You have to discover new ways to free up more time. A good way is to start to say 'no' more often. Say it when someone asks you to do an extra bit

of a task because 'everyone else is far too busy.' Unless you are able to do the thing immediately, just say no. In this way you will complete your daily tasks and then have time to take the first steps towards your new life! What will you say no to now? What is preventing you from doing what you want? Is it because of:

- where you have to be
- what you might have to do
- the need to acquire some more skills
- lack of congruence with your beliefs and values
- conflict with who you are
- lack of congruence with your life's purpose?

Perhaps you feel quite scared about setting out to do something different, because this will initiate a series of changes which include becoming someone else. When you change, so do other people who connect and interact with you. However, when you finally, bravely, take that step it's a common experience to find that it isn't as frightening as you thought it would be. Generally, people are surprised at how much better they feel once they start, and then the rest becomes much easier, too. The benefits of initiating change for your life after Medicine are huge. Life will be different, so prepare for it and make it the way you want it to be instead of just letting it happen.

