

About me

My name is Haval Balata. I am now a Consultant Respiratory Physician at Wythenshawe hospital in Manchester. I use the word 'now' because I have only been in post since September 2019 although I did act up in the same job for the final three months of my training. I trained in the North West deanery. Outside of work I spend most of my time with my young family. My hobbies tend to be all things sports related.

My Job Plan

I have a specialist interest in Thoracic Oncology and a lot of my day-to-day work is to do with lung cancer. Although I did train in general medicine my consultant post is a respiratory only job and I have no formal general medical duties. My job is officially broken down into 12.5 PAs. This includes 10.5 DCC (direct clinical contact) PAs, 1.5 core SPAs (supporting professional activities) and 0.5 ANA (additional NHS responsibilities) PAs. To my simple mind a PA roughly equates to around 4 hours of work although in reality it is more complicated than that. 12 PAs essentially means I work 8am-6pm Monday to Friday but it's not as bad as it sounds and I'll explain why later.

My weekly DCCs include interventional bronchoscopy lists, outpatient clinics, MDTs, lung cancer screening sessions and ever-increasing admin. I cover the ward one in six weeks. The on-call burden is fairly light at Wythenshawe. SPA time is critical and I use it to keep up-to-date, do my research, write/review papers, committee duties and so on. Use SPA time wisely. The ANA PA is because I have accepted a number of additional roles including 'Responsible Physician' for the Manchester Lung Health Check programme, clinical lead for the bronchoscopy unit and clinical lead for the Navigation Bronchoscopy service (looking to establish as a new service).

Applying for a consultant job

My first tip when it comes to applying for jobs is to relax a little. It is of course a big moment in your career but it is not the final chapter. Circumstances change. Job plans change. People move between jobs. I say this because I have seen a lot of close friends become completely consumed by the process which will only have a negative impact on you and those closest to you.

My second tip would be to take the time to really think about what it is you want in a job. Consider factors such as the job plans, future colleagues, location, potential for development of services and room to develop as a person. Whilst of course as an applicant you need to impress your future employers don't forget the Trusts are just as desperate, if not more, to land the right candidate. You are no longer a trainee that will be given a rota and told to get on with it. You can negotiate your job plan. There will be elements of the job you will be expected to deliver but there is always room to manoeuvre. If you really don't want to do certain things, say so. If you really do want to do something that isn't listed, say so. You'll be amazed what they will be willing to do for you if you are deemed to be the right candidate.

Finally, do not undersell yourself. If there is ever a time to promote your brilliance it is now. You have probably spent over 10 years developing your skills and your CV, this is the time to put it all on display. Use all of the allocated space on the application form and make use of the 'any other relevant information' box at the end. This is especially important if you are applying for a competitive job with several applicants. If shortlisted make sure you take the time to visit the hospital and meet the right people especially those likely to be on the interview panel. Speak to those that have worked there before and any newly hired consultants at that trust who are likely to have gone through a similar process recently. As for the interview itself, prepare well so that you feel ready on the day. Practice answering

questions with someone you know and trust and take onboard any feedback given. There are 100s of example questions and videos freely available online. Remember if you have made it this far the chances are they want to hire you so back yourself to do well and be successful.

Consultant life

There is no denying that consultant life is very different to being a trainee, mostly for the better in my opinion. There are definite initial feelings of 'imposter syndrome': Am I good enough to be doing this job? Have I had the right level of training? But the answer is yes! Remember you have worked very hard to get to this position and if you have been offered the job then it is because you are the right person for it.

There are certain things which take some getting used to. The first is having your name figuratively 'above a patient's bed', something you'll not be familiar with. Suddenly you'll have results and correspondence for patients you have never come in contact with which can be a little strange if not daunting.

Within the first three months of the job I had to attend a coroner's inquest for a patient that I had never met. I'd managed to avoid the coroners throughout my junior doctor years. I've had to respond to 'incident forms' for patient's I've had nothing to do with. The significant increase in admin is definitely a challenge and a downside to the job. The trick is to develop a system whereby you don't miss anything important but you don't waste too much time on the things that are not. Some of this will depend on where you work, what team you have around you and what IT systems you use. Your secretary can help you with this a lot.

Most things about being a consultant are positive. The best is having the flexibility to manage yourself and your own time. Certain aspects of the job have set times such as clinics or procedural lists but others such as ward rounds, meetings, non-DCC sessions

can be moved around to suit your timetable. This makes other aspects of life outside of work, for example nursery drop-off/pick-up duties, easier as you can adjust your start/finish times accordingly. As long as you deliver on your responsibilities you can generally do so on your own terms. So that Monday-Friday 8am-6pm thing is not as bad as it sounds. Another great thing about being a consultant is the ability to delegate. There are lots of people available to help and you must to learn to do this well. You can focus your energy on things that require your knowledge and experience and delegate the 'number crunching' to your keen team. Getting to know managers in your directorate is also very important. These are people you will have had very little interaction with as a trainee but you'll be amazed how much they know and can help you with. If you are interested in improving or developing a service then they would be the people to speak to. Make friends with them.

So in conclusion consultant life is different, busy and difficult but hugely satisfying. My view is you've worked hard to get there so embrace it and enjoy it. I'm still new to it all so I suspect it does take a couple of years to get comfortable in the role but it's certainly not something to fear. You can make a bigger impact on your patients, colleagues and department that you ever thought possible. Good luck and enjoy!