

# Kicking goals, saving lives

Dr Jessica Foley is a full-time doctor and part-time professional football player ...

**D**R Jessica Foley is a general practice trainee, who currently works in the 24/7 community emergency department at Noarlunga Hospital in Adelaide's south.

Last weekend she had a self-described "brain fade" but the good news is the mistake came in her "other life" — on the football field as a member of the Adelaide Crows AFLW side.

On Sunday Dr Foley gave away the AFLW's first ever double 50 m penalty, which led to a North Melbourne goal. Ultimately, it didn't change the result — a cosy 35-point win to the Crows, but, in a way, it continued Dr Foley's record-setting sporting career.

At 35 years of age, she's no stranger to top-flight sport, having represented Australia in basketball, captaining the Adelaide Lightning in the Women's National Basketball League and playing for the prestigious Duke University Blue Devils in the United States while studying pre-med courses between 2002 and 2006.

"When I came back to Australia after graduating from Duke, I was intending to go to medical school but I realised I still had a lot of basketball to play. Obviously medical school is a big commitment, so it wasn't until 2013 that I started studying graduate medicine," Dr Foley tells the *MJA*.

Football is certainly not what she expected to be doing 2 years ago.

"You start out as a junior doctor and you don't think that you've got much time for anything other than working and choosing your career pathway in medicine," she says.

"And I had already done the professional sport thing for many years with basketball, so I thought that was all behind me. Then the AFLW started, this opportunity

came up and as a kid, I would love to have played footy.

"I thought, I've got to give it a go."

Her football life started in the SANFL with Sturt and in 2018 she won the Coaches Award and was named in the Team of the Year. Adelaide drafted her into the AFLW this year and she's been a regular in the ruck, and also as a key defender or forward.

Although the AFLW is still semi-professional, the time commitments in training, gym sessions, publicity appearances, travelling and playing are substantial, and fitting in full-time work at the Noarlunga Hospital has been a challenge.

"As a general practice trainee, I could have started out in the community in February. But because of football, it's been better for me to be doing shift work. I'm in ED now, then paediatrics and then I'll hit the community later in the year," says Dr Foley.

"[Noarlunga] has been absolutely amazing. I went along to the shift coordinator with my football schedule during the season and put exactly what shifts I could work every single day for her. And she has completely accommodated me.

"I don't think that most employers would be able to do what they've done for me. Certainly, without that I'm not sure I would have been able to make the [commitment to the Crows]."

Leading such a double life is a big advantage, Dr Foley thinks, when it comes to dealing with the stresses and strains of a doctor-in-training's life.

"I think it's massive, so important," she says.

"You can get caught up in how much you work and how tired you

are. And if you get in that cycle of going to work and going straight home, sitting on the couch and eating and sleeping without having something else to take your mind away, you can get a lot of burnout and stress.

"But going to something else, going to training completely eases my mind. Being around different people, not talking about medicine, not going home and thinking about it.

"It's better for you to have everything else going well in your life, whether it's a partner or having hobbies or interests or something that gets your head out of that cycle of medicine.

"Puppies are great. I honestly think that dogs make you happy as a person. If I could take my puppy to work, I think I'd be able to treat twice the people I do."

It's a busy life, but Dr Foley knows it's right for her.

"If I wasn't enjoying it, I wouldn't put myself under so much pressure and so far, I think it is actually good for me."

Medically, her goal is general practice and a future focus on sports medicine.

"I'd like to do both, probably. Sports medicine is pretty narrow, so I don't want to focus in too much at this stage. I'd like a broad base of knowledge, so general practice. And then I'll move into sports medicine later." ■

**Cate Swannell**

doi: 10.5694/mja2.50065



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