

A 17-year training journey ... and counting

Dr Jim Stewart has stayed the course over almost two decades to get where he, his partner, and 4-week-old son, want to be ...

THE day Jim Stewart talks with the *MJA* he is sitting in the waiting room of another doctor's office, waiting on the 4-week review for his brand-new baby boy, who is "doing all the right things at the right time", according to his proud parent.

It's a new challenge for Dr Stewart, who is a PGY8 microbiology registrar at Monash Medical Centre in Melbourne, but then, his career so far has been a 17-year adventure full of challenges.

In 2000 he began a Bachelor of Science at the University of Melbourne, completing his honours year at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute (WEHI) in 2003 with research into Leishmaniasis under supervisor Dr Emanuela Handman.

"Like everybody, I wanted to do some travelling, but that meant I had to earn some money," Dr Stewart tells the *MJA*.

Then followed 3 years with the Department of Pathology as a research assistant under Dr Vicki Lawson working on neurodegeneration research, including tutoring first-year medical students in the Department of Medicine.

"I realised that life in research is really hard," he says. "There was a lot of insecurity. The happiest person in our lab was a guy who was a clinician-researcher, and that [opened my eyes]."

He then made the switch from pure research, opting to do his post-graduate bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery at the University of Queensland, starting in 2006.

"I had been looking to move away from Melbourne and UQ, Flinders or the University of Sydney were the choices at that time for post-graduate medical study."

After completing his MBBS, from 2010 through 2012 he was stationed at Cairns Base Hospital, completing rotations in medicine,

surgery, emergency medicine, intensive care, obstetrics and gynaecology, and general practice, as an intern and PGY2.

Then it was down to the Royal Hobart Hospital for PGY3 and 4 – including 6 months as an emergency registrar and 6 months in general medicine. In 2014 he also sat, and passed, the Royal Australian College of Physicians' written and clinical exams on his first attempt.

It was back to Cairns for PGY5, first as an ICU registrar, then a medical registrar, including stints in infectious diseases, palliative care, cardiology and neurology. He finished PGY6 as an infectious diseases advanced trainee at Cairns Base Hospital.

In 2016, his PGY7 year, Dr Stewart returned to Brisbane, working at the Princess Alexandra Hospital as an infectious diseases advanced trainee. He was also an associate lecturer at UQ.

Next year he will sit Part 1 of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia exams, as well as continuing his Masters degree in public health and tropical medicine, through James Cook University in Townsville.

Why infectious diseases and microbiology?

"Even before I started Medicine, I was interested because of the Leishmaniasis research I was doing at WEHI," Dr Stewart says.

"I like that it is a super diverse field. It's a specialty with real generalist aspects to it. There are broader themes – antimicrobial stewardship, public health. It's really hard to imagine what the big challenges are going to be. And often they really capture the imagination of the popular media."

Travelling around so much for his training has been an added bonus as far as Dr Stewart is concerned, and he wouldn't change a thing about his pathway so far.

"It's been a fantastic experience," he says. "I've been really lucky with the different places I've worked. Cairns, for example is a regional city but it has a real culture of excellence and has retained a core group of physicians. Similarly, in Hobart, there is a good culture."

"Royal Hobart is a small tertiary hospital but it has very high standards, even when they're strapped for cash."

"The diversity I've experienced has been a real benefit to me."

The only downside has been missing the opportunity to build a strong network of contacts and mentors in one capital centre, he says, and even that isn't an insurmountable problem.

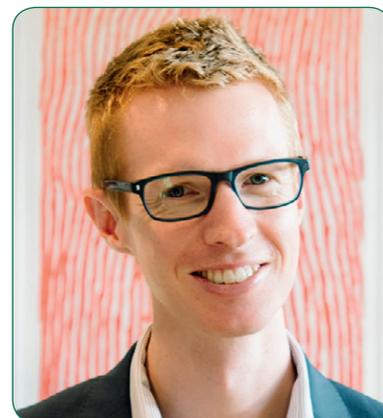
Dr Stewart's partner is also a PGY8 advanced trainee, in psychiatry. They met in medical school and have been together ever since.

"Both of us have been moving around a lot, following opportunities, and every time it has been the right opportunity for us," he says.

"At this stage you're starting to get an idea of the kind of consultant you want to be. We've got places in mind where we'd like to end up, and certainly Cairns is one of those places, but we do have to be a bit flexible."

And now, with a 4-week-old, the challenges keep on coming.

"You decide what your priorities are, and you do the best you can with the time you have. It's exciting."



Dr Jim Stewart

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Cate Swannell

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