

End of first year Fellowship report

Why did I apply?

I have been an admirer of Wessex Appraisal Service ever since I experienced my own GP appraisal for the first time having qualified the year previously. My appraiser created space for me to think about my future as a qualified GP and it felt like the first time that I had actually sat and talked to a GP colleague about what I wanted from the job and my career. It was in turn transformative and I was set out on a path to meet like-minded local senior leaders. A cascade of meetings and opportunities later I decided a GP portfolio including leadership, diabetes and education was for me. The opportunity to join HEE for a day a week and work within the Wessex Appraisal Service was too good an opportunity for me to miss. As a keen member of the RCGP I was aware of the work that Dr Susi Caesar was championing and I felt sure the learning and experience under her mentorship would be incredibly valuable and what a year it has been.

Working alongside the 3 other incredibly talented GP Fellows has been such a wonderful experience. Being a part of a wider network of interesting and motivated HEE GP Fellows has been inspiring and energising. It complements my clinical work as I have learned transferable skills in management and project delivery and the autonomy offered by the fellowship translated into such meaningful work. I have recently valued hearing about the wide range of topics and projects completed by the Fellows at the recent HEE Fellowship Conference. It was rewarding to reflect on just how far we had all come.

What have I achieved while working alongside WAS?

During my time with Wessex Appraisal Service I was able to see first hand just how dedicated the team behind the scenes are. I was able to experience the leadership skills of chairing, running a business while supporting GPs in the closest possible way during an ongoing global pandemic. I enjoyed learning skills of summarising lengthy contracts into one-page summaries, interacting with the incredible team of vastly experienced senior appraisers and helping to add a more recently qualified GPs voice to the quality assurance tool – the SUPPORTs tool. This tool is used to review appraiser work and sets the level of what high quality work was asked of GPs appraising across Wessex.

I have a passion for supporting and listening to colleagues and I was delighted that I was able to train as a new Appraiser alongside the fellowship. This gave me a very good insight into the rigor behind each and every Appraiser. I have been humbled to see the care and dedication of the team behind this new position as a “rookie appraiser”! I have thoroughly enjoyed working as an appraiser and can see myself developing my skills further over the coming months.

Our joint fellows project “What the Hidden Half think” has been presented as a poster at two national conferences – the RCGP and the FMLM and I am currently leading on a writing this up for journal publication. Spending time working with my WAS GP Fellow colleagues has been such fun and I have learnt a lot in working remotely on joint projects.

My personal project was a subject close to my heart. In retrospect, I now recognise the “coaching-in-appraisal seed” was sewn at my first ever appraisal where my appraiser skilfully coached me through my thought process. I wanted to find out how frequently and how confident our appraisers were in coaching. The results were surprising with only 59.4% of respondents feeling confident in coaching appraisees and 16.2% suggesting they never use coaching in appraisals. The full results can be seen here (insert link to powerpoint presentation/refer to powerpoint already shared). I concluded that not having a formal qualification can inhibit confidence for some appraisers, or prevent them naming what they do as coaching, even around the goal setting in the PDP. Thematic analysis found that coaching conversations were most reported to happen during periods of transition for appraisees, e.g. retirement, career dilemmas, and changing work patterns. An abstract has been submitted to the RCGP/WONCA conference in June 2022. One intention of the project was to provide additional coaching training for appraisers but then the announcement that WAS would be decommissioned

from April 2022 changed this strategy and instead I have produced a FAQ document to support coaching in appraisals (<https://www.wessexappraisal.org/page/resources>). As I look towards the next 6 months I have been selected to train as a mentor/coach and am currently gaining accreditation with the European Mentoring and Coaching Council - <https://emccuk.org/>. I feel this work will complement my portfolio well and it truly feels like a legacy from this Fellowship.

How did I spend the study budget?

Alongside all the learning within WAS and 1:2:1 support from Dr Susi Caesar to look at personal development I have been using my study budget to complete the FMLM “Tomorrow’s Strategic Leaders” Course. This 10-day course is the most intensive self-discovery journey I have been on as a future leader. It has complemented experience gained as a recently qualified GP in the Next Generation GP Programme and in my leadership portfolio but has challenged me. The Leadership Development Framework and FIRO Business Leadership reports have enabled me to recognise my strengths but more importantly recognised the challenges and developmental stretches to equip me with knowledge and tools to lead more strategically. I have enjoyed the exposure to the group of primary and secondary care leaders across the UK and feel the peer support through the regular Action Learning Sets (ALS) have allowed personal growth to occur in debating personal challenges faced along the last 12 months. These ALS sessions have added to the ALS sessions with the wider fellow network.

Final thoughts and the next chapter

The very act of writing this brief summary has crystallised the enormous amount of learning I have had during the first 12 months of this fellowship. I feel very grateful for the support of my supervisor Dr Susi Caesar who has been unwavering in her support even through tougher times when my mother died in late 2021. I would like to extend my thanks to all the WAS and in particular Gill Watson, Chris Davies and Jools Mumford who provided so much help to me. From the very beginning I have felt part of the team and it was a privilege to see the team concluding in March after a wonderful 15 years.

I am so excited to be embarking on the 6-month extension and would like to express my gratitude to HEE for recognising and believing in the fact that fellowships allow GPs to diversify and grow alongside clinical work. I believe this in turn keeps us well, interested and working as clinicians delivering healthcare to our populations despite ever-increasing challenges.

Julia Hempenstall julia.hempenstall@nhs.net HEE (Wessex) GP Fellow with Wessex Appraisal Service

