

From Uncertainty to Impact: My Fellowship Journey

The fellowship journey has been much more of a roller coaster than I initially expected. When I started, I felt a real sense of excitement and possibility. I had protected time, an opportunity to step away from the usual clinical pressures and, perhaps most importantly, I knew I wanted to explore leadership and make a meaningful contribution, particularly around the confidence and representation of female and minority ethnic doctors. What I did not realise was how much of the fellowship would be about learning to live with uncertainty. I did not have a clear map or a project that I knew would succeed. I remember wondering where the fellowship would lead and whether I would be able to turn my ideas into something meaningful.

Looking back, the emotional cycle of change captures my experience remarkably well. There was the initial excitement of possibilities, followed by a dip when ideas did not translate into projects, a period of questioning, and eventually a renewed sense of direction.

The beginning: wanting to explore leadership

My first idea was around developing leadership opportunities and confidence. I then refined this towards understanding the barriers faced by female and minority ethnic doctors, including confidence, representation, role models and access to leadership development.

The ideas mattered to me, but I struggled to turn them into something realistic and deliverable within the fellowship. That was frustrating. I had imagined that having protected fellowship time would naturally lead to a clear project and a tangible outcome. Instead, I found myself asking whether I was actually making progress.

I then tried to reshape the idea and looked more specifically at enhancing leadership among trainees and the first five years of GPs. Again, although I felt the topic was important, it did not develop into a project that I could realistically take forward.

This was one of the first important lessons of the fellowship. I had initially assumed that having a good idea was enough. I learned that an idea also needs the right timing, people, infrastructure, support and a clear enough focus to become something deliverable. I also learned that letting go of an idea that is not progressing is not necessarily failure.

During this period, I continued to invest in my own development. Completing the King's Fund leadership development course was particularly valuable. Even though my project had not taken shape, I was still developing myself. The course gave me new perspectives on leadership and helped build my confidence. It also reminded me that development does not always happen through a successful project. Sometimes the learning is happening quietly in the background.

Another important part of the journey was attending a webinar about TYFU in Wales. The programme was close to the type of leadership development I had originally been interested in. Seeing it delivered at whole-deanery level was inspiring because it showed what could be achieved when there is the right level of infrastructure and support behind an idea.

At the same time, it highlighted a reality that I had to accept: it was not something that could simply be replicated in Wessex. The context and infrastructure were

different. This was probably the lowest point of the journey for me. I had already tried to develop my original leadership ideas, then refined them, and I was still struggling to find a project that would take off.

This was the plateau or what I think of as the valley of the fellowship. The excitement I had felt at the beginning had disappeared for a while. I had to step back and consider whether I was trying too hard to make something happen simply because I had started with a particular idea.

That experience taught me something about resilience. Resilience is not always about continuing to push against a closed door. Sometimes it is about recognising that the door is not going to open and being willing to look for another one.

The turning point: becoming part of something bigger

The turning point came through IMG Thrive beyond induction sessions. This was where a virtual tabletop simulation project came into my fellowship journey.

The project was very different from what I had originally imagined. It was not a project that I had created and owned individually. It was a wider team effort through the IMG Thrive/IMG TPD team. The simulation was presented through the Thrive sessions, which provide a platform for IMG GPs and residents to thrive, learn and access support. The Thrive sessions are usually a safe supportive environment where IMG residents could ask questions, discuss and reflect without the pressure.

The concept of the virtual tabletop simulation was simple but powerful: shared mental rehearsal in a safe virtual environment. Residents worked through a scenario together, took on different perspectives, asked questions, made decisions and then reflected on what had happened.

What mattered to me was not simply the simulation itself. It was the environment it created. Residents could practise, speak up, make decisions and learn from each other without the pressure of getting everything right.

Being part of this project also changed how I thought about leadership. I had initially been looking for something I could develop and own. Instead, I found myself contributing to something that already had a team, a purpose and shared ownership.

I learned that leadership does not always mean being the person at the front. Sometimes it is listening, contributing, encouraging, coordinating and helping others succeed.

The feedback from residents was particularly rewarding. The session was rated highly for relevance, engagement and usefulness, residents felt safe and supported, and 90% said they would like more sessions like it. For me, this reinforced the importance of creating spaces where people can build confidence through practice and shared learning. That is something I would like to carry forward beyond the fellowship.

One of the unexpected gifts of the fellowship has been the people I have met. I have developed relationships that have broadened my thinking and opened doors I could not have predicted.

I have learned that networking is not simply about collecting contacts. It is about relationships, conversations and staying connected. Not every connection produces an immediate outcome. Sometimes its value only becomes apparent much later.

The tabletop simulation also reinforced the value of teamwork. It was not my individual project; it was a collective effort. Different people brought different strengths, and the final product was better because of that.

That has influenced how I now see leadership: less about ownership and more about contribution.

A surprising full circle

Perhaps the most interesting part of the fellowship happened in the last two weeks.

Just as I had started to think that my leadership ideas had come to an end, I was contacted about the Next Gen GP Wessex event and invited to contribute to its organisation and planning.

I said yes.

It may seem like a small thing, but to me it felt significant. The leadership thread I thought had disappeared had simply changed direction.

The project I originally wanted did not happen. Another idea stalled. I became involved in something completely different. And then, unexpectedly, leadership came back through another door.

It reminded me that a quiet project is not necessarily a failed project. Sometimes an idea needs time, a different environment or simply the right opportunity.

What I am taking forward

The biggest outcome of my fellowship is not one particular project. It is how I have changed.

I have greater confidence in my ability to adapt. I understand that perseverance does not mean endlessly pushing the same idea; sometimes it means recognising when to change direction.

I have seen how creating a safe environment can help thriving and I have realised that leadership can be much broader than having a formal role or owning a project.

Most importantly, I have learned to embrace opportunities rather than wait for the perfect plan.

I started the fellowship wondering, *"Where will this lead?"*

I now realise that I did not need to know.

The fellowship has taken me through excitement, frustration, uncertainty, learning, new relationships, teamwork and unexpected opportunities. It has not been a straight line and perhaps that is what made it valuable.

If I were to leave myself with three messages from this journey, they would be:

Persevere through the dip.
Let go of what is not working.
Keep the door open.

Because sometimes the door you thought had closed is simply waiting to open
somewhere else.