

Niamh O'Connor – 2017 Alumni

I left SHS in 2017 with A-levels in Biology, Chemistry and Maths, having decided to embark on a career in Medicine. Unlike many of my peers, I was quite late in deciding to do medicine. It wasn't something I had put much thought into, until one of my teachers at the time suggested the idea, so I looked into the role of a doctor and thought that it aligned well with my aspirations. I then spent the rest of sixth form frantically gathering work experience, immersing myself in books, preparing for medical school interviews and feeling nauseous every time I opened an e-mail from UCAS. When results day came around and my place at the University of Liverpool was confirmed, I couldn't have been more excited.

Unfortunately, I broke my ankle two weeks before starting and had to move into university with my leg in a plaster cast, so Fresher's week wasn't quite what I had envisioned. Regardless, my 5 years at medical school couldn't have been more fun. The first two years were mainly lecture and seminar based; centred around the study of anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology of disease. Many weekday evenings were sacrificed in the library to ensure that weekends were free for socialising and relaxing. The remaining three years of medical school were based entirely in hospitals and, rather nicely, felt like being back at school (although, as uniforms go, scrubs must be the comfiest). All of us were split between wards and departments but would reconvene at lunchtime in the medical student common room for a catch up and were guaranteed to bump into each other when having a day in the library. We rotated around specialities every 4 weeks meaning that we got to experience almost every corner of medicine throughout our time as students.

Graduation was one of the most exciting days, and much like leaving school, was full of bittersweet emotion. This was soon overtaken by nerves and the daunting feeling that I had to be a doctor now. A proper doctor. No matter how many times I'd studied the BNF, I still had to scratch my head when prescribing paracetamol for the first time.

As I'm writing this, I have just finished my first rotation as a foundation year 1 doctor. Even 5 years of medical school couldn't have prepared me for the whirlwind that it's been, with a lot of ups and downs – recognising an unwell patient, performing CPR, failing to take bloods, managing to take bloods, breaking bad news, giving good news. Some days are full of teaching opportunities, discussions and feeling like I was made to be a doctor. Other days I leave work lost for words and suffering from some serious imposter syndrome. Medicine really is the most fascinating career and, whilst it's not always the smoothest ride, the opportunities offered are like no other.

Like many of my colleagues, I hope to spend time travelling and working through different jobs, to help me gain more experience and decide what kind of doctor I want to be. A lot of junior doctors choose to travel to Australia or New Zealand for a year following completion of the foundation programme (the first two years of being a doctor after graduation). This is a great opportunity to travel, work in a different type of healthcare system, and gain new life skills. At the moment, I have interests in anaesthetics, but medicine is fairly flexible and I am keeping all options open. Some weeks look more like 64 hours in work and a lot of custard creams dipped in coffee, other weeks look more like a spontaneous flight to Rome, and I wouldn't change that one bit.



Graduation day – The calm before the storm



On a 12 hr shift – In the lift because 8 floors is a lot of stairs after a pack of custard creams



In Rome – Eating lots of pasta after working four 12 hr shifts