PERSONAL ACCOUNT

The Junior Doctors Leadership Group

DCT Catherine Liu reviews a unique programme that trains junior doctors to develop personally and professionally to be effective leaders and make positive change in a hospital setting. Catherine was the first dentist to be accepted onto the programme.

A junior dentist trying to survive and succeed in hospital faces many challenges. University, foundation training and core training equip us with the tools to become good clinicians, but clinical skills and knowledge alone are not enough to be effective clinicians. For those of us who hope to one day become consultants, interpersonal qualities, strength of character and self-awareness are often the real make-or-break. Although there is a tendency to prioritise our development of these qualities below certain practical skills, we are realising more and more that these so-called 'soft' skills are actually quite hard.

I am fortunate to have been part of this year's Junior Doctors Leadership Group (JDLG), a unique programme at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Trust which takes a group

doctors and taught them how to flourish in an ever-changing NHS landscape.

As the first dentist to be involved in the JDLG programme, I wasn't sure what to expect. The group was made up mostly of junior doctors in foundation training or in the early stages of core or specialty training, plus some management graduates undertaking placements in the NHS, and then me. We met up eight times throughout the year for the JDLG sessions; these weren't lectures on a step-by-step way to become a good leader or dictations of a list of leadership qualities which we just needed to memorise – these sessions inspired us to delve deep within ourselves and individually figure out what made us good leaders.

The JDLG was enlightening in an unexpected way by teaching us about ourselves. After doing the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

methods of building resilience and coping with stress (for example, getting 6–8 hours of sleep simply isn't possible if you're on call or have an endless list of work), we helped each other work out how we could make a small, stress-protective change with a SMART goal that suited our own lifestyles.

We couldn't help but recognise that a lot of this stress came from the system in which we worked, and since we might not be able to improve the situation in the short-term, we needed to learn how to work effectively within this system. The immersive Power Lab workshop showed us this: we took on roles within a fictional structure and learnt to understand the dynamic power patterns that are inherently established within a system. We also worked through scenarios together on things like resolving conflict, pitching ideas and negotiation, to improve our ability to handle the complexities of working with others in a hierarchical structure.

On top of all this, the JDLG provided a brilliant opportunity to integrate with other specialties, which is especially rare and important for us isolated dentists. From listening to my medical colleagues share their experiences, I grew to understand more about the challenges they face and how these are managed, and we can take inspiration from this to improve our own practice. Moreover, stronger connections between various healthcare specialties will ultimately aid provision of better holistic care for our patients.

I am grateful to Daghni and Martin for making the JDLG such a brilliant opportunity, and for accepting me to be part of it. It has been an unforgettable and invaluable experience, and one that I hope more junior dentists will be able to share in future years. ■

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of its junior doctors and helps them grow into future leaders. It has been designed and led by Daghni Rajasingam (Consultant obstetrician and Deputy Director for Postgraduate Medical Education) and supported by Martin Fischer (expert advisor in leadership development), to include seminars, workshops and simulations with the aim to encourage our personal development. The programme also facilitates us to carry out a quality improvement project within the Trust, putting our learning into action, enabling us to make a real, positive change. Since its conception over eight years ago, the JDLG has seen through eight cohorts of junior

assessment we explored what our results meant, and we were encouraged to think about it not as an excuse to feel limited in certain ways, but as a diagnostic tool to highlight where we could improve. I found it useful to discuss it with my fellow JDLG members, and I came away from it ready to tackle my weaknesses head-on, and being proud to be an ISFJ.

One of the seminars revolved around the hot topic of stress and resilience. We unanimously agreed that being a junior doctor (including junior dentists) was highly stressful, and the job bore a significant risk of early burnout. Whilst we lamented the practicality of some well-known generic