

CATHERINE THATCHER SIZE 5

Audio Producer: Andrea Rangecroft

I think it changes people's opinions of you when you tell them that you're a doctor, so I don't, it's not like my opening statement is "Hi my name's Catherine and I'm a doctor." I usually only answer that question when directly asked "What's your job?", or "What to do for a living?", and then I would tell people, but otherwise I don't think that's information that you need to know, because I worry that it comes with added expectations and different judgment. And it's usually very positive, but that makes me feel a bit awkward, because at the end of the day I'm just normal person that got good A levels and went and did a medical degree. I'm not superhuman by any stretch of the imagination, and lots of people do what I do. So I don't think I'm special and I don't think I should be treated in such a way.

I'm Catherine Thatcher, I'm twenty six. I live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and for the past three years I've been working as a junior doctor in Sunderland Royal Hospital. You know, finishing medical school and becoming a junior doctor, it's a learning curve. It's like a vertical jump in terms of your progression in your knowledge, your clinical skills, but also your professionalism, your communication, your maturity. Who you are as a person, I think, radically changes in the couple of months from finishing being a medical student to being a junior doctor. And you meet such a wide variety of people and it's good to see how different people do things differently. So even though we're all trained roughly the same, the way that you approach things can be so different, and that is sort of expressing your personality as a doctor. Which I think sometimes gets lost, because we're not, we're not robots We're not machines we are just humans that have been trained to do something, but we all do it in a slightly different way. For the first year of being a junior doctor, I was quite good at leaving things at the hospital door, so I didn't take a lot of things home with me, and I don't know if that's because I was a bit naïve, and you maybe don't think as much about the consequences of what you're doing, but certainly as I've gotten further on in my training and higher up in my job I do, you do start to take a lot more things home with you and I don't know if that just comes because as you progress in being a junior doctor you get more responsibility, and the more responsibility you have, I think, the more it does dwell on your mind, and sometimes it is hard to just shut that off as soon as it hits eight o'clock or nine o'clock, as soon as you finish your shift.

There are patients that you always remember. There won't really have been anything markedly different about that patient but they just stay with you. For a long time... And its, yeah... For me it's, like, older patients and people that you've helped to have a dignified death that stay with me, because a lot of being a junior doctor, it isn't this sort of exciting glamorous *Holby City/Casualty* line of work, I don't run around saving lives every single second of my working life. Actually the majority of what I do is making people feel comfortable and helping people to die and those are often the patients that stay with you. The patients where you managed to achieve that and that makes you feel really good and it reminds you of why you got into your job and why you did it in the first place. Today I've still never cried at work. But there was, there's always going to be patients that do make you feel upset and then, when I worked in general practice, there was a guy that came in and he was in his sixties and a very similar age to what my dad is at the moment, and that was sad, because he came in and as soon as he walked into the door of my office in the GP surgery, I knew straight away that potentially something quite serious was going on. And I was the first person he'd seen and he said "I know that I'm really unwell and I think I'm going to die," and it was sad because it was true, he had had a lot of weight loss over the past couple of weeks to a month. And he'd also

started to look a bit jaundiced, so he'd come in because he'd noticed he'd started to look a bit yellow. So I don't know how long he'd maybe been like that at home, and had been putting off coming to see the doctor either. And sometimes you can ask all the right questions but patients will still sometimes conceal things from me in terms of the answers that they give you, for whatever reason, and it turned out he had aggressive pancreatic cancer and then we sent him into hospital and he ended up dying ten days later and it was al so sad because it was, it was so abrupt, there wasn't, there was no warning for him, but I also felt like I didn't really have any warning and there was, there was, there was nothing else. Literally nothing else that we could have done to change the outcome of that situation, and to feel helpless is, as a doctor, is often really hard, to feel as if there's nothing that you can do to make that situation better, that can be really tough. I don't think about my own mortality at all. I think that if you are a hypochondriac it would maybe be different, and you may imagine that you've got all the conditions under the sun, and I think, if anything, it makes you realise how great it is to have your health and how amazing it is that some people that don't have their health, what great job they do of being, you know, amazing human beings, despite having really quite horrible health problems. So it..in that way, I think it's good. It gives you a bit of perspective, you know, your cold and your man flu really doesn't matter that much.

I think the main reason I decided to stop being a junior doctor, in terms of coming out of training, was because I wasn't quite sure what direction I wanted that to go in, and getting into medical education was something that I felt passionate for, and been involved with for the whole time, essentially since I stopped being a medical student. And I'd always really enjoyed it and then this job came at Sunderland as a teaching fellow and it just seemed like a really good opportunity and then the prospect of working nine to five Monday to Friday for a year, I'm not going to lie, it was a big, big pulling factor as well. You know, education isn't what I want to do with the rest of my life, and when I started this job, it was always my plan that after a year of being a teaching fellow and after a year of working in medical education, I was going to get back into training where I was going to pick up where I left off and continue being a junior doctor, and now I just feel like the carpet's being pulled from underneath me and people have completely derailed my plans and I just feel adrift as to what I should do. I feel like...I know, I feel really...I feel...I feel really tired of the current political situation the UK, and I know that you shouldn't run away from your problems but I've decided that I'm going to run away from my problems and I am considering moving to Australia, where you get a much better work life balance. You're really well supported and you get paid really well comparative to the UK and it's really sunny all the time. You shouldn't be given health care according to how good a person you are or how hard you worked or how much money you earn. It doesn't even matter if you haven't worked hard for all of your life, you still deserve health care. Regardless of who you are. That's not for us to judge, you should just be given health care because you're unwell. That's it. I do like, I do love my job, I love what I do every single day and when I was an F1 and F2 I loved what I did every single day. It's not that I hated being a doctor and that's why I don't want to be a doctor anymore. It's everything else that goes along with it, that's making me not want to be a doctor anymore. And it's just feeling devalued and feeling that even though we work hard, that's not enough. I'm certainly not going to jump back into training anytime soon. And it feels really difficult and it makes you really question about if this is what you really want to still do anymore, to be honest, it's really hard.