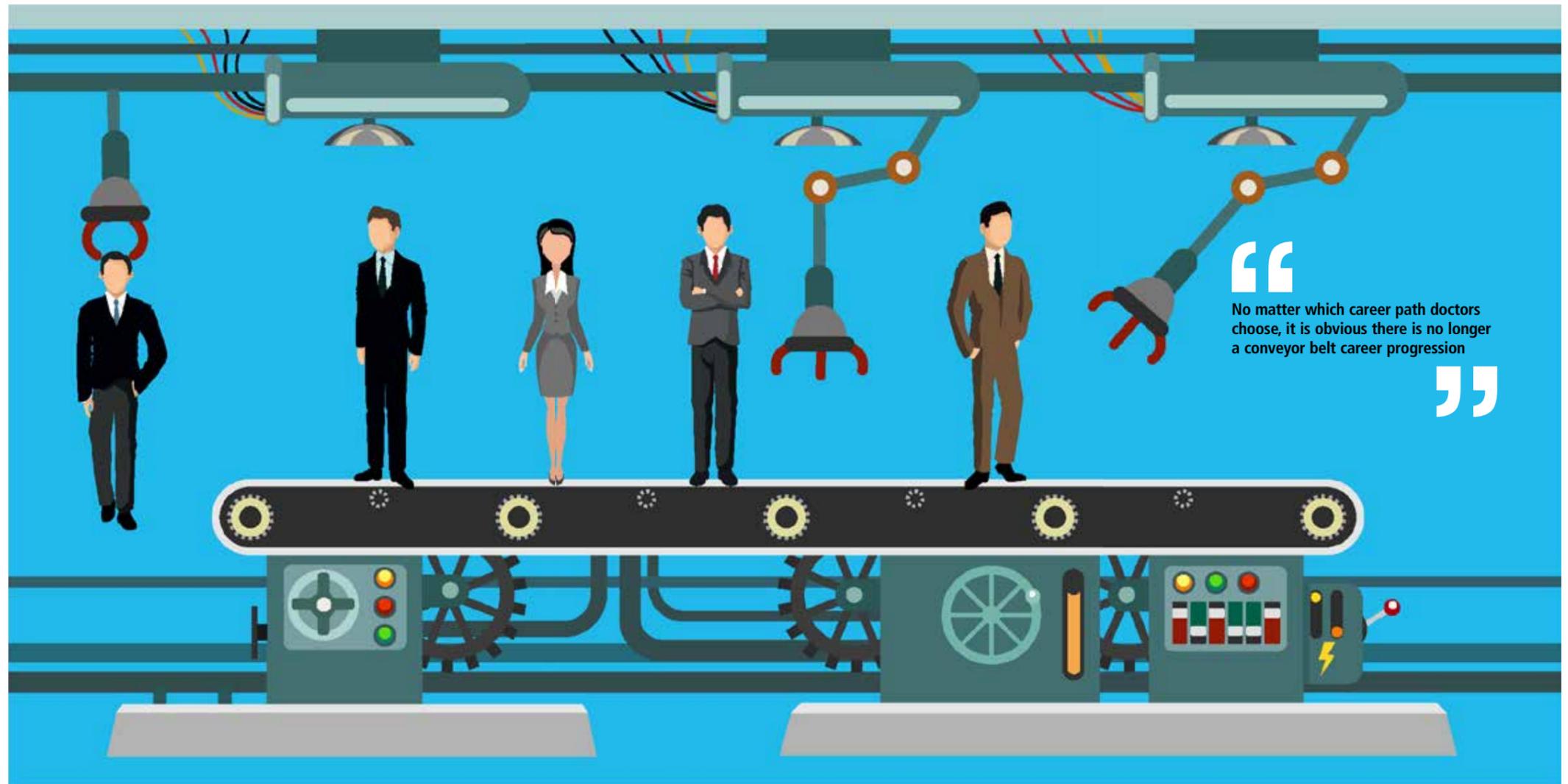


CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Having progressed from hospital doctor to management consultant, it is now **Dr Michelle Tempest's** mission to get more doctors involved in the management of healthcare to help guide positive change from within. Dr Tempest (above) tells her story to Independent Practitioner Today



“No matter which career path doctors choose, it is obvious there is no longer a conveyor belt career progression”

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Doctors make good managers

NOTHING CAN replace the journey of being a front-line doctor.

The camaraderie of medical school, the 100 hour weeks as a junior doctor, the long nights on call, the specialty training and those very distinctive hospital smells.

Every day is an honour and a privilege, every patient unique. However, the number-one concern for our future health and social care system is staffing.

Recruitment and retention of staff is fast becoming an anathema for both public and private sectors in both hospital and community settings. Locums are in

high demand and the number of junior doctors rejecting higher specialty training has sky-rocketed.

I am one of the statistics who left the front line; for me there was no single light-bulb moment when I decided to hang up my stethoscope.

In fact, my personal journey was a very slow cross-taper of careers, working part-time in management consultancy at Candestic, and part-time as a liaison psychiatrist for more than a decade.

It was in a different era when career paths were inflexible and gaining experience outside the

hospital walls was hardly ever spoken about, let alone done.

But the future generation of doctors has diverse opportunities beyond rigid rota systems and can contemplate career options spanning from entrepreneurship to big pharma. This article considers embracing the choice to be a management consultant.

Management consultancy

For so many doctors, the title 'management consultant' conjures up pejorative connotations, most leading to the question: 'will they borrow my watch to tell me the time?'

Sadly, many clinicians have witnessed ever younger management consultants coming in and out of their hospital, promising so much in terms of cost savings, mergers and restructures, while contributing little change to front-line care struggles.

However, until you have walked in the shoes of good consultancy teams who put both head and heart into delivering benefits for patients, clinicians and businesses should put their cynicism on pause.

It's actually my personal plea to get more doctors involved in the management of healthcare to

help guide positive change from within.

Management consultancy is a broad term covering everything from strategy, change management, financial, IT, human resources and operational improvement.

To be a strategy consultant, you need to deeply understand the market and be able to think outside the box to help solve your client's problems, even in politically-laden environments.

You also need to clarify and predict how the future will be different from the past, spotting the opportunities for improvement

and growth while keeping in mind cost savings and efficiency.

To do this, you need to work long, hard hours to collect raw data, analyse it in a way that makes sense for the healthcare economy, and present the data in a logical and clear way to deliver the impact and change required.

Thankfully, there are plenty of transferable skills that doctors have that are relevant for management consultancy. They are:

- An innate knowledge of the healthcare economy and how to communicate;
- A passion for care and under-

standing of the care pathway. At the end of the day, the business and economics will only ever make sense if the product delivers high-quality, patient-centred care; ■ Knowing how to do the right thing, even if this goes against the populist cacophony of thinking and lobbying.

Doctors also have a special work ethic. The gives them:

- The ability to communicate complex ideas and academic knowledge in plain talking language;
- The enjoyment of working in close knit teams and knowing how to inspire the best from your team mates;
- A love of evidence-based data and a rigorous focus on outcomes;
- Knowing how to work to a deadline even if that means working late and weekends.

Doctors are also open to continuous learning and creativity. This allows them to:



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- Be inquisitive. No clinician can make a diagnosis without asking the right questions. Business can be very similar;
- Find creative ways to create impact, and make the change fun;
- Develop and keep up with new knowledge to progress the industry and profession.

The doctor's dilemma

I am often contacted by disillusioned doctors stuck in the belief that they are nothing more than a cog in a wheel, not valued as an individual.

Managers and politicians of the past have often used the mantra: divide and concur. As soon as the team spirit is broken, individuals can become dogged by anger, bitterness and in-fighting.

As a result, many doctors are left in a quandary, wondering whether they should leave their profession after so much personal sacrifice to get there.

Yet it can be during this feeling of self-doubt that the strategic mindset should come into full force.

There is an opportunity for doctors to join forces with management to bridge the divide between forward-thinking healthcare providers and develop new technologies, new partnerships and expand into emerging markets.

There is a need for everyone to become more outward-thinking to solve the increasing demand tsunami of patients living longer with more long-term conditions.

Key strategic challenges will be faced during this journey and team-working will become ever more important.

In the past, doctors often left it late in their career to become business-savvy.

Some waited until they had stepped into a board-level position. Others found their feet by developing their own business during the transition between NHS work and developing their own private list and private income stream.

However, management skills will become paramount much earlier in the doctor's career path and here are some examples of why:

Big data: Healthcare is changing. For example, a research team at the University of Nottingham has recently created artificial intelligence to predict which patients will have strokes and heart attacks within the next ten years.

Although use of big data is still in its infancy, there is no doubt that such new businesses will need the guidance of experienced clinicians.

It is likely that independent-sector providers will want to be early adopters of technology, driven by more consumer-focused patient customers.

Home care: With primary care apps such as Babylon, Push Doctor, Doctor Care Anywhere and eConsult, it is only a matter of time until more specialty interaction is delivered online.

With such transformations come opportunities, not just for lawyers and data security experts, but also for clinicians to lead by example on what can be treated by smartphones, alongside the Internet of Things (IoT). This market has the potential to expand globally.

Flexible working: To retain medical staff on the front line, working patterns are going to have to become more accommodating.

Medical staff may be enticed by a career portfolio. The most forward-thinking providers are likely to encourage the next generation of clinicians, often eager to help yet buried under NHS bureaucracy, to come and solve managerial quandaries.

In fact, HCA International Hospitals recently announced a step in this direction, with junior doctor 'Fellowship for Future' programmes.

Summary

No matter which career path doctors choose, it is obvious there is no longer a conveyor belt career progression. Businesses and clinicians will have to work hand in glove to answer the complex questions of how to prepare providers for the future.

To be future leaders and solve problems, management consultancy experience will help. As with anything in life, you write your own story and your destiny is in your hands.

So if any of you want to get involved in management consultancy or want to learn some new skills, please feel free to drop me a line. Do not choose complacency; choose hope and have faith that together we can make a change. ■

Dr Michelle Tempest, is a partner at Candesic, a bespoke health and social care consultancy: www.candesic.com

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