

Leading the Way 3: Seizing opportunities as a resident doctor, with Dr Josh Hodgson

Transcript of podcast

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Jonathan Darling

Hello and welcome to this RCPCH series of podcasts on leadership. I'm Jonathan Darling. I'm Vice President for Education and Professional Development at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child health, and this podcast comes from our belief that leadership is for everyone and it's about making a difference around us in our clinical and wider work. Today, it's my pleasure to introduce Joshua Hodgson, who's an ST6 trainee at Evelina Children's Hospital, and I'm hoping this will give us an opportunity to think about how leadership fits in with training, and to talk about some of those issues and maybe some resources that can help us. Josh, a warm welcome to the podcast.

Josh Hodgson

Thanks so much for having me, Jonathan.

Jonathan Darling

So maybe to start off, Joshua, if you'd tell us a bit about your journey so far, where you're at in training, and maybe a few things you've done along the way, just to kind of give us a feel for where you're at.

Josh Hodgson

Certainly, yeah. So, as you've said, I'm a specialty trainee in year six in London, currently the Evelina London Children's Hospital and undertaking paediatric intensive care medicine subspecialty training. So that's the clinical context. We're here today to talk about leadership. So, how has my leadership journey unfolded? I think, as is the case for many people, it's been somewhat serendipitous, and I've been lucky to have opportunities come along the way. And those things have ultimately led to some roles which I'm undertaking at the moment, including as the ePortfolio and curriculum representative for trainees across the country with the Royal College of peds and also with the faculty of medical leadership and management, FMLM on their trainee steering group as their communications lead. And I'm sure we might come on to explore how I came to get those roles and the opportunities that they've opened for me and others.

Jonathan

Great. Well, you mentioned about this sort of idea of serendipity and things coming your way. Tell us then what might have been one of those that led you towards thinking about leadership?

Josh

Yeah, well, I think there have probably been countless ones over the years, as is the nature of all of our lives, and probably many of them have passed me by without even realizing, but there's one that's definitely stuck with me as being a very obvious, fortunate opportunity. And that was when I was in ST1, ST2, pretty junior in training, and was approached by one of my consultants at the time with an opportunity to join a pilot leadership program run by one of the big hospitals in London. They were recruiting trainees of different experiences, at different grades to pilot this program. And I happened to

be there, one of the trainees that this consultant approached, we had a bit of a pre-existing relationship and thought that I would be suitable to give this a go and see what the pilot can learn from us and what we can learn from it. So, we had a conversation around that, and we agreed that it would be a good idea to jump at the opportunity, and that was a significant leadership course and a qualification, despite it being a pilot, that then enabled me to put that on my CV, have lots of other conversations when I was applying for progressive leadership roles, and I think I really struggled to see how I would have followed the pathway that I have done without that window, having presented serendipitously through that one particular consultant at that time.

Jonathan

So that opportunity came along and you grabbed it. Did you have any second thoughts? Or was it an easy decision?

Josh

It was relatively easy because I think I was grateful to have been in the position to be approached by the consultant. It could have been anyone, I didn't see myself as being any more qualified to be approached and to receive that offer than anyone else. So, I think recognizing that was helpful. And yeah, therefore I felt it would be crazy to turn down this opportunity, but I equally did feel a bit nervous and a bit intimidated. I'd be trying this pilot I knew as one of the most junior trainees amongst lots of other senior trainees ready to become consultants. So, it was a little bit intimidating at the same time, but I knew it was a great opportunity, and so had a conversation with the consultant, learnt a bit more about it, and thought, yeah, let's give it a go.

Jonathan

Great. So, some of our listeners might be wondering, well, is this pilot or the course still around, because they might want to join it, but I believe it's not still continuing. Is that right?

Josh

No, it's not, like many other great up and running projects, the pandemic finished it off, from what I understand, which is a great shame, and hopefully they can re-establish it or something similar going forwards. But indeed, there are various other similar opportunities to develop leadership experience and learning that can be implemented in practice, progressively senior roles. So, there are alternatives, and I'm very happy to talk about those, and how trainees can think about getting involved.

Jonathan

Well, maybe we'll come and cover those towards the end. Coming back to your course, what would you say you took from it? You talked about it leading on to other opportunities, and it made you think about being involved in leadership in a way that perhaps you wouldn't have done otherwise. But was there anything particularly you actually took from doing that course that you'd like to share?

Josh

So, what did I take from this course personally? Well, I think again, there are two key things there for me. The first is the very practical consequence of being able to build a CV that was a bit more leadership slanted, and that inevitably opened up some doors and opportunities to take roles further. The second is the skills that I learned during the course, which were transferable, and all of these are non-technical, human skills that are not surprising things. But I think if I had to choose a single one as standing out, that would be communication.

Communication, I think, is the most important thing in so many aspects of our life, professional and indeed personal lives also just as true for leadership, I think, and I really began to appreciate how

important it is in different contexts, in emails that you might be writing to your team or in the context of meetings, and so was able to communicate a bit more consciously and in a different style of leadership and management, and been able to take that forwards and expand on it further in all the roles and other experiences that I've gained since.

Jonathan

Brilliant, so you had that amazing experience it sounds like, where you were able to combine theory about leadership, some practice, reflection, mentorship, all coming together, and then some things you took away and you've mentioned communication as a particular one. And just stepping back a bit, and I wonder, as we think about where leadership fits with training, what's the reason somebody might consider doing it? You know, getting involved in leadership roles during training when you've already got quite a lot to do and you might think, well, I'll just delay that till a bit later on. Can you give us some thoughts on why do it during your training?

Josh

I think that's such an important comment, because training is busy. We'll all know there's plenty to do just to get through each year, tick the curriculum boxes, get through ARCP as well as perform well, if not better, doing our normal day to day job. So, what's the benefit of doing these things, which we might consider to be extra? Well, I think there are two things to say there. The first is that arguably, some of these things are not extra, and leadership and management features in the college curriculum from ST1 through to ST8. And so developing some sort of these skills is a necessary part of our training. And I think that's completely appropriate. The it is possible to tick those curriculum boxes without doing too much in our own time, which, again, I think is the correct thing. That's how training should be. But, if you wanted to take things a bit further, as I and many others have done, then there are opportunities to do so. Why would someone want to do that? Why would someone want to go to dive even further into leadership as a trainee in particular?

Well, I think it's in order to gain skills that you can then carry forwards. I mentioned communication being one, you might focus on other soft skills, team working, and many more. And I think these are helpful for all aspects of our work. So, you learn a lot of transferable skills actually. I think the other thing to say is that leadership is how we drive change, and I know for me, when I was a trainee, even from the very beginning, I was so frustrated by silly things I was seeing going on around me. Maybe it was a particular process, getting on the computer, having to change my password every five minutes, or some frustration at work that we all experience countless times a day. And I felt disempowered by not being able to change those things and thought it would be so nice if I could just make everyone's working life easier and ultimately, hope to look after our children and our families in the best way. So how do we do that?

Well, it's through leadership. And management is how we drive change. And so from a fairly early period, I wanted to do what I could in order to do that, in order to make our care and our working lives better. And I think the final reason that someone might want to start building a bit more of a career around leadership and management from a fairly early stage is in order to be able to progress that later on in their career as well. I always think about as trainees, we can sort of direct our career in a few different directions.

There's obviously the clinical side of things which should come first and foremost in training. But then there might be other secondary interests we develop. Lots of people choose to do something around education which is brilliant. Others may choose to do research, and I think another third arm is leadership and management. And often, as I see consultants and think about their lives more, they tend to have a secondary focus alongside their clinical work in in one of those three areas, principally. And so personally, I envisage having more of an interest and more of a role in in leadership and management for the same reasons of being able to drive change. I think that's a very different way of

working to our clinical work, which is interesting. And so being able to build a bit more of a career that's aligned with those goals from a fairly early stage, I think, is a sensible thing.

Jonathan

Thank you. You've done roles within RCPCH, in the trainees committee and so on. Just briefly mention those roles, but I think it'd be helpful if you could say a bit more about the experience of volunteering with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child health, and what it's meant for you, what others might take from doing that.

Josh

Absolutely, So I've been working with the trainees committee for the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child health for around five years now, that was with two roles. The first was as the regional representative for my area geographically, and the second was as the e-Portfolio and curriculum representative. So, they've been enormously valuable experience, and I'd really encourage any listeners, trainees, to think about applying for those, and trainers to encourage their trainees to do so. If you find them all on the College website. They've been great opportunities to see the inner workings of the college, which, at a fundamental level, has just been interesting and they've been really valuable experiential opportunities to develop my skills.

I've had a real privilege through those roles in terms of meeting plenty of people within and beyond the college who are interesting and have lots of input to the wider delivery of child health within the NHS. I've been able to undertake some project work, including a nationwide survey of neonatal resuscitation training and from a personal point of view, that's been helpful in CV building, to have a publication out of it, for example, and much more importantly, it was hopefully beneficial for our training and our patients ultimately. And being able to do a big piece of work like that at a national level was something I definitely would not have been able to do if it weren't for having a role on a national committee such as for the college. So, I think, in summary, it's an opportunity to meet interesting people, understand the wider healthcare system and to make a change at a big level.

Jonathan

Thank you. The other thing you've been involved with is FMLM. I always find it difficult to say that one, but stands for faculty of medical leadership and management. Tell us a bit about what that does from your perspective and how you're involved.

Josh

Thanks Jonathan, yeah, spot on. FMLM, bit of a tongue twister. Yeah, exactly. So I've worked with their trainee steering group for a couple of years now as their communications lead. And I think the really, the benefits have been very similar, and it's another national committee. This is obviously now for a body that is specifically leadership and management focused, and also is multi-specialty, so that's provided a very different spin on the sphere of leadership and management for me, as well as having the direct experience that was very comparable having a role on a national committee. It's also enabled me to interact with people and organizations who are specifically focused on healthcare, leadership and management. So again, it'd been very interesting to see that organization develop and grow and have some insight and contribution to the inner workings.

Learnt a huge amount about soft skills, we've had some additional training through that, which has been great. And again, an opportunity to drive big change at a high level that's in the meta position of being related to leadership and management. And if I had to choose one example of an amazing piece of work that trainees should be aware of that's done by the FMLM Trainee steering group, it would be their leadership commitment. So, everyone can go and have a look at that, I'd really recommend it, and that's a document that any local trust can subscribe to, commit to delivering a certain standard of leadership training and experiences for all of their resident doctors they have. So

that could be a powerful piece of paper to see A) what we as resident doctors should expect from our employers with regards to our leadership management training and B) for employers to aspire to and then commit to delivering.

Jonathan

Thank you. Now that leads us on, I think, to resources we touched on those earlier. So FMLM, I think you're a member, aren't you? That's right. Take it to another level by becoming a member and then there's a fellowship and so on. But what other resources are you aware of? The people who are thinking, I'd like to develop my leadership abilities and skills, and I'm not sure where to turn. Tell us a bit more what you've found could be useful.

Josh

Yeah, really important. Listeners might be thinking, oh, this is all well and good. Josh got lucky and had an opportunity come on. But what can I do if this is something that I want to develop? There are things you can do.

The first and most important thing, I think, is knowing where to look, in case you don't remember everything that Jonathan and I talked about today, which I think would be very forgivable. I would really recommend the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Leadership hub. That's a web page that has a collection of resources, they're really worth taking a look at. The FMLM also have a similar set of resources available on their website as a landing page, and indeed, the two websites link to one another, and that will summarize two things that we've talked about earlier. A) getting the theoretical foundation, and B), getting the experience.

So, what are some, some examples of those things that you'll find on those web pages, but you can also search for separately. Well, an example of a learning course that is readily accessible to everyone to establish the theory is through the NHS Leadership Academy. They have various resources actually, but one that I would really recommend is the Edward Jenner program. That's one I've done myself. It's fairly straightforward, doesn't take too much time, it's free as a modular digital learning program that encourages a bit of foundational learning and some reflection about your own experiences as well. So that's the Edward Jenner program through the NHS Leadership Academy, well worth taking a look at.

And then, what about experiences? At some point you have to get a bit stuck in and really that's how we learn soft human skills, which are the foundation of leadership and management. And I think you can think at every level, you can think about local departmental level. It might be that you choose to take on a role as a trust representative or as a rota coordinator or coordinating their teaching program within your department, for example. You may look beyond the department; you may look to the region and your school of Paediatrics for example, they'll have a committee that you could get involved with, have a look at their website, and indeed, beyond to national committees and national roles. I've spoken a bit about the couple with which I'm involved.

Another thing to be aware of is there are these things called Leadership fellowships out there. So various organizations offer these, they're often one-year programs that could be taken out of program, for example. And examples include the Darzi fellowship, the Royal College of Paediatrics again, have a Leadership Fellow, and also the FMLM have their own as well. There'll be various other organizations too, you could do it in other contexts, like global health, for example.

We've spoken a bit about getting the theory, getting the experience. And I think the third piece of the puzzle is getting this all documented and recorded so that you can evidence it if you're applying for other roles. And also, it's just an opportunity to reflect, so you can document this experience in any way that you wish. What I'd recommend, though, is some form of leadership passport. And again, the FMLM is a great place to look for that. They have a template document called their leadership passport, which just encourages you to document the learning that you're taking, both theoretical and

experiential, and do a bit of reflection. And you can use that to really build a strong portfolio, if that's what you want to.

Jonathan

Is that an ePortfolio type document or something you download and keep in your own files?

Josh

Yeah, it's in PDF format on their web page, from what I understand at the moment.

Jonathan

Sounds very useful. As we come towards the end, I'm thinking about, how do we combine leadership and our clinical roles and the rest of life. How do you make it all fit together?

Josh

Yeah, I think particularly as a trainee or a resident doctor, that can be a challenge, because we don't have much time outside of our clinical service delivery in order to work on these things. That maybe some consultants have dedicated professional activity time to a leadership role, but we don't as junior doctors unless we're doing one of these leadership fellowships that we've just talked about. So, balancing all of that, life's complicated enough, isn't it? It's difficult, and I think there's no ubiquitous solution. Everyone's going to have a slightly different way of working these things in.

I think being opportunistic is important, and understanding that actually, our day-to-day work involves a huge amount of leadership and management, and we don't necessarily need to do much more. It's more about how we think and reflect on the things that we are doing. And we can certainly use some of the time that we have. We should, in accordance with the trainee charter, be entitled to some time to develop our own curriculum, and a part of that is leadership and management. So in time that we should all have incorporated in our rotors to be off clinical duty, to develop ourselves, that would be a very good opportunity to look at undertaking some of these courses that we've spoken about, or even a local leadership role, and spend some time doing the associated work with that, for example.

And again, some of the project work we'll undertake anyway, if people are undertaking quality improvement work, for example, this is a form of leadership and management absolutely, especially if you're overseeing such a project. So, a lot of the stuff we'll already be doing will be very relevant 100%. It may be that people want to go above and beyond and still use some of their own time to develop these things in this portfolio further because it's an interest or they're particularly dedicated. And I think that's also fine if people want to do that, it's just like any other aspect of work that we have to be conscious. We have to balance it against our other enjoyments and things in life and make sure that we're not getting too focused on work and detracting from other things.

Jonathan

Thank you, and you're not so far off your the end of training, two or three years I think?

Josh

That's right.

Jonathan

Are you aware of any good resources or things that can help in terms of stepping up to being a consultant in due course?

Josh

Yeah, well, the Royal College of Paediatrics offer a transition to consultant course, which is which is really helpful. I've heard positive feedback from that, from peers who are a bit ahead of me and have been through that process. And the other thing I'm anticipating is just spending increasing amounts of time talking to consultants and people who have gone through the process recently, and really learning from them about what the challenges are, what the great aspects are as well, and understanding what we can do to help ourselves with that transition.

Jonathan

Thank you. I think we're bit out of time. Josh, it's been great talking, and we've covered lots of useful resources and things that can help people who are either in training or involved with trainees, or for any of us in our leadership journey, there's lots in that that I think we can take away and use usefully. So, thanks very much for the chance to talk. We're coming towards the end, but as we do that, would you like to give us a final thought about leadership?

Josh

Yeah, well, thanks so much for having me today, John, it's been great to talk about this stuff. So, I'll just end on a on a message to the resident doctors out there, I think. That is to say that you can, you can do this stuff, leadership and management. You're doing it already, even if you don't know it. And if you want to take it further, then you absolutely can. How do you do that? Get yourself on the Royal College of Paediatrics leadership hub. Have a look at what's on there, undertake some basic foundational training. The NHS Leadership Academy is a great place to look for that. Think about taking on some roles locally, regionally, even nationally, if you want to, and spend some time reflecting and getting it all documented. I think you'll have a lot of fun. I think you'll develop as a doctor and even, dare I say it, as a person, you'll meet a lot of interesting people, and first and foremost, the reason we all go to work every day, this is all about making lives better for our patients and their families.

Jonathan

That's a great message to finish on. Thanks, Josh.

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