

**Leading the Way 12:
The quiet power of SAS doctor leadership
Transcript of podcast
Jonathan Darling and Kumar Swamy**

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Jonathan Darling:

Hello, I'm Jonathan Darling. I'm Vice President for Education and Professional Development at RCPCH, and I'm your host for Leading the Way podcast, which is our college podcast about leadership in paediatrics and child health. And I'm really delighted to introduce today's guest, Dr Kumar Swamy. Kumar is co-chair for the RCPCH SAS Committee, and he's going to tell us more about that in a minute, and is a neonatology specialist in Nottingham.

So welcome, Kumar.

Kumar Swamy:

Thank you, Jonathan. Thanks for having me here today.

Jonathan Darling:

Thanks for coming. Maybe to start off with, can you tell me a bit about your roles at the moment, particularly regarding leadership.

Kumar Swamy:

Sure, yeah. So I'm a SAS doctor working as a specialist neonatologist in, at Nottingham University Hospitals and I became a SAS specialty doctor in neonates in 2012 and progressed to a specialist grade in 2021.

Alongside my clinical roles, I've always been, had a strong interest in leadership, education, and advocacy for SAS doctors. I joined the RCPCH SAS Committee in 2015 and served two terms which was quite a steep but incredibly valuable learning journey for me. And about four years ago, I became co-chair of the SAS Committee and I also represent the RCPCH on the AOMRC SAS Committee.

So Academy of Medical Royal College's SAS Committee. So locally, I've been SAS tutor at Nottingham University Hospital since 2019 where I support around 74 SAS doctors. This includes organizing SAS educational events,

supporting them to access bursaries because they don't get study leave funding and and also offering career guidance.

I've also been involved in recruitment of SAS doctors both at the trust level and through the college.

Jonathan Darling:

Thank you. That's great. So can you tell me- Sure ... just to set the scene a bit more about the, what SAS doctors what that acronym stands for, a bit more about the different roles that are included and how they contribute to the NHS?

Kumar Swamy:

Sure. So SAS is an umbrella term covering specialty doctors, associate specialists and specialists.

SAS doctors are highly skilled clinicians who form a vital and growing part of the NHS workforce and I'll come to the numbers in a minute. Specialty doctors generally work at registrar level but specialists operate at a senior level and some contribute to consultant rotas. Associate specialist grade no longer exists for new entrants although some doctors have remained on the old contract by choice.

Under the twenty-twenty-one SAS contract, SAS doctors progress more quickly through the pay scale and can reach the top of the scale earlier than previously. And all the SAS doctors receive a minimum of one-to-one point five SPA time. So to become a specialty doctor one require requires a minimum of four years of postgraduate experience, of which at least two years needs to be in their relevant specialty.

But for specialist doctors they require at least twelve years of postgraduate experience including six years in their relevant specialty. As I said earlier, so the data from the GMC and the RCPCH show that around thirty percent of the doctors in the UK are SAS doctors and this number is growing and in paediatrics, around thirteen percent of the workforce are SAS doctors.

Crucially, SAS is a positive career choice and not a fallback option. These are permanent non-rotational posts offering flexibility, consistency, geographical stability, as they don't have to move jobs. There's a lot of job security and opportunities to sub-specialize in their area of expertise and often a w- better work-life balance.

Personally, I have cherished my career as a SAS doctor.

Jonathan Darling:

Can you say a bit about what proportion of the NHS workforce or doctors- Sure ... they make up?

Kumar Swamy:

Yeah. So data from GMC and RCPCH surveys show that around thirty percent of doctors in the UK are SAS doctors, and this number is growing.

And in paediatrics through the RCPCH survey around thirteen percent of the workforce are SAS doctors.

Jonathan Darling:

So a significant part of our workforce. Yeah. And I was interested then in terms of how you see that pathway. Is it like a, an alternative pathway to become a substantive post in the NHS?

Kumar Swamy:

These are permanent non-rotational posts offering flexibility, consistency, geographical stability, as they don't have to move around changing jobs. So there's that job security, and there's also opportunity for sub-specializing in their area of expertise, and often there's a better work-life balance.

Personally, I've truly cherished being a SAS doctor and choosing this career.

Jonathan Darling:

Great. Thank you. Maybe let's move on then. You took on a role in RCPCH on the SAS committee. Tell us a bit more about how you got involved in that.

Kumar Swamy:

I became involved with the RCPCH SAS committee because I was aware of the challenges SAS doctors face both locally and nationally, and I wanted to support the SAS community through college-level work.

Yeah ... a colleague of mine was a chair of commit... SAS committee around that time and encouraged me to join, and I joined the committee in two thousand and fifteen and completed two terms as a committee member, and then I was appointed as a co-chair about four years ago. I could, I worked out how the

committee meetings work worked out what it involves, and that definitely encouraged me to become the co-chair. And currently what happens is as a co-chair, I alternate chairing committee meetings three times a year and also represent the college at the Academy of Medical Royal College's SAS committee and work closely with the college officers.

Jonathan Darling:

And who is your co-chair?

Kumar Swamy:

My co-chair is Dr Jamil Hamad is a ED specialist who works in emergency department on the consultant rota in North West, and he also leads his department.

Jonathan Darling:

And I'm just interested in how that co-chairing works. It... Is that an intentional thing that you've got two people in the chair role together?

Kumar Swamy:

I think it was because I think, I don't know how many people applied when we were interviewed. We were offered co-chair, and I'd never co-chaired any committees or led on any other things. But co-leading definitely brings both strengths and challenges and definitely, the having shared perspectives mutual support, job sharing, and the ability to cover each other.

For example Jamil was on sabbatical for a year and where I covered all his jobs as the co-chair. And there are definitely challenges that includes, like disagreements sometimes. But when that happens, we address it constructively outside of the meetings. Overall, I think co-chairing works extremely well and is a leadership model I would strongly support, and I would I would take up co-chairing other, you know, other leadership roles really.

Jonathan Darling:

Sounds good. Then turning to the, what the committee is doing. You mentioned part of your reason for joining was you saw some of the challenges that colleagues were facing. Yeah. And I think you saw that committee as a way of helping address that. Which I guess is how many leadership roles were at the

people see the need for something to be done or changed and they wanna get involved.

So can you tell us a bit about what the committee what are some of these challenges, and what's the committee doing about it? And you in that committee.

Kumar Swamy:

Yeah. Recognition and career progression are the biggest issues for SAS doctors. And the major focus of our, of my work has been raising awareness of these issues through the college.

We discuss these issues in the, in our committee meetings three times a year. Run SAS focus sessions at the RCPCH conference actively promote SAS career pathways through milestones, webinars, and now this podcast. This is what we've been doing to raise awareness. And I've been particularly involved in securing college support for SAS Six strategy which is a grassroots campaign by the SAS collective which basically is six key improvements to support SAS doctors in educational supervision, professional development, access to specialist roles leadership and management opportunities, fair contracts recognition of teaching roles.

Definitely College has been very supportive of that, and it's officially College is supporting SAS six strategy.

Jonathan Darling:

That strategy you mentioned SAS six. So if anyone wants to Google it you could find information about the detail of that. Is that right?

Kumar Swamy:

Yeah, it's available. It's available.

Jonathan Darling:

Where's that come from? You mentioned it's grassroots. Is it a body, a body that's done it, or?

Kumar Swamy:

It's from SAS Collective, which is a group of SAS doctors, quite senior in their roles. Some of them are dean of medical school and yeah, it's come from a group basically who have campaigned for SAS doctors and supporting SAS doctors in every level.

So yeah. And most colleges and most colleges in the UK have been supportive of this and I think there are hardly a couple of them which haven't been, but it's still work in progress.

RCPCH:

We'll be right back after this short message.

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Jonathan Darling:

And do you have a sense of how you've been able to address some of the challenges as a group or in your leadership role?

I guess it's a core part of leadership when you're trying to bring some change or persuade people or help people see the importance of this area of our workforce you're not always gonna get people signing up immediately. How have you gone about it to get people to engage?

And you said the College has been supportive. What's helped in that?

Kumar Swamy:

Having people who have supported SAS doctors all the while for example, the current president has always been very supportive of SAS doctors since he was a registrar. And all the College officers who attend the meetings and other College officers have been very supportive of SAS doctors when they've been shown what these doctors are and what they're capable of and how highly skilled they are in their specialties.

The challenges continue to include there's always difficulty contacting SAS doctors who are not College members because not all of them are. And raising awareness of SAS roles across the wider NHS has been a difficulty and that's why we've gone the route of of we are doing webinars promoting through milestones and, and podcasts, for example.

The other challenge has always been imp- you know, com- company communication with local SAS leads. And as my role as SAS tutor within the East Midlands region and Midlands region we're always promoting SAS doctors and supporting them and try to address these challenges as much as possible.

Jonathan Darling:

That role that you mentioned, I think you said you're SAS tutor is that right? In your- Yes ... hospital. Yeah. Would every trust have such a tutor? Yes. Or is that an unusual thing? Yeah. So there would be somebody... And it sounds like you have quite a lot of people you're kinda working with in that role, about 70 or so.

Yeah. Is it, is that quite busy in itself?

Kumar Swamy:

Yes, actually. So I get one PA for being SAS tutor and as I said with a... it's a large trust, Nottingham University Hospital, and we have about 74 SAS doctors. And basically this is to support their educational needs, and it's a role funded by NHSE.

And so one PA comes from NHSE basically. And having SAS tutors in o- as to answer your question earlier question of do all trusts have SAS tutors? Yes, they should, and they all do. I think there'll be probably, one or two in across the country who won't have SAS tutors.

Jonathan Darling:

So if somebody was thinking about a, an SAS role- ... would there then be somebody like yourself that they could talk about it with? Yeah. Would that be as part of your role?

Kumar Swamy:

Yeah, absolutely. There are a lot of LED doctors who have approached me and as SAS tutor and asked how they go about become a, becoming a SAS doctor and we have signposted them to different documents what they need to achieve to become a SAS doctor.

And there are generic capabilities which they need to fulfill to become a specialty doctor or a specialist. And yeah yeah, we always support people who approach us to become SAS doctors. Thank you.

Jonathan Darling:

And I'm interested in resources or things you've found have helped you in your leadership journey.

Kumar Swamy:

Yeah I've always... as I said, leadership is very much learned through experience and reflection, and my leadership development has largely come from talking to people, networking, learning from other leaders observing experienced leaders attending meetings and, observing those people, how they speak, how they lead a team, how they convey the messages they want to convey to their team.

And of course, getting involved in the college committee definitely was one of the main things which which helped me a lot in developing my leadership skill. There are other aspects like departmental leaderships and trust management which people can get involved as SAS doctor.

And of course, they anyone can undertake leadership and management course which is, sometimes there are day one-day courses, one to two-day courses, or there's diploma as well, which they can do. Yeah, that's that's how.

Jonathan Darling:

Great. And early on, you mentioned the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges.

So that's where all the colleges come together. Yeah. A-and so you... There's a, an SAS committee within that I believe. That's right, yes. And you represent paediatrics on that committee. Is that right?

Kumar Swamy:

So as part of being a co-chair of SAS committee of Royal College paediatrics we were we were asked to either attend AOMRC or council, and I took up the AOMRC.

So AOMRC has a SAS committee within within that and I represent the RCPCH. And they expect a report every at every meeting written report from the colleges what we've been working on and what we have achieved. And all colleges come

together, and we discuss the issues from their particular colleges and what they've been working on and how they've helped.

And we learn from each other. And definitely it's a very good platform for all the royal colleges to get together and learn from each other and support SAS doctors. And apart from few colleges in the AOMRC, most of them are supportive of SAS 6 strategy and, And the other things we do is we meet with GMC and discuss issues about SAS doctors and how GMC could help SAS community.

And because as I said earlier it's a growing workforce and thirty percent of them are already SAS doctors. Yeah, these are the things we are working on through AOMRC. Good.

Jonathan Darling:

As we come to the end are there any key messages you'd like to leave with us about leadership and what you've learned?

Kumar Swamy:

Yeah. I would say SAS doctors are vital to NHS, and becoming a SAS doctor is a positive, fulfilling, and sustainable career choice which offers flexibility, stability, and excellent opportunity for professional development while maintaining work-life balance. Being, being, SAS-- being a co-chair of SAS committee and being SAS tutor definitely I've learnt a lot and supported these group of doctors and would continue to do and and as a college and as a NHS workforce, we should continue to increase recognition of SAS doctors and support them locally and through all their royal colleges. And the opportunity within SAS careers are vast. I know a lot of SAS doctors who have become service leads, clinical directors, or even medical directors, so the sky truly is the limit, to be honest

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