

Out of Hours Medicine:

are we not a muse?

To increase the chances of a place at medical school, academic stuff aside, it was often helpful to have other strings to one's bow. I recall my year's intake having county sportsmen, established business entrepreneurs, political sages, artists, IT impresarios, and dancers who'd stun the judges of *Strictly*. And that was just the front row. One hundred and fifty bright sparks with curriculum vitae packed to the gunwales. Somewhere near the back row, I sat with music as my offering alongside my Hippocratic Oath.

The irony, though, is that medicine does its best to try to muffle the very bowstrings that secured us that place at medical school. Long days, on-calls, out-of-hours, research, logbooks, exam revision, meetings, QOF tables, CQC inspections, fatigue. In truth, our vocation is not great for keeping the muse alive. Many non-medical talents are muted or even snuffed-out by the rigours of the profession.

I initially wended a surgical path, getting fairly deep into orthopaedic training before discovering, or indeed rediscovering, general practice. 'Rediscovering' since it was the first discipline we encountered at our medical school. After one open fracture too many, I quickly realised I still loved general practice as much as I did in medical reception class. It is also the profession that has allowed me to continue all those

elements that were part of my upbringing. The rest of the world think general practice is a soft option. It is quite the reverse and it is often gratifying what else one can allow oneself to achieve when already busy.

Risking the fruits of hours of music lessons and myriad orchestral rehearsals, medical school quickly brought a convenient overlap: the medics revue. Southampton University's show was huge: five performances, 2000 audience members, a budget of £15 000 and a whole term's rehearsal. The cast were propelled to infamy and every consultant wondered whether they possessed enough charisma to get a sending-up. The resulting 15 medics revues were perfect training for what happened next.

I couldn't help but be inspired by two friends and colleagues from my hospital surgical training days: Rob had summited Mount Everest half a dozen times and had rowed across the Atlantic, while Steph won an Olympic gold medal shortly before getting an MBE. As you do.

Possibly following some wine, I put the phone down to my best friend and musical soulmate. We'd decided to write a musical. The next thing we knew, we'd written *The Decent Rogues*, cut a demo, formed our company Music is Life Productions, found a cast and director, been booked by a theatre, scored major sponsorship, auditioned a



Kerensa and Zelah hold the men's attention in the *Talisman Inn*. World premiere of *Pencoweth*, Bath, 2013.

cast, sold-out a premiere run, won two awards, and toured the show to a high-profile off West-End theatre. The logical thing, as a 10-session GP surgeon with a young family would probably be to admit I'd had a bloody good innings and call it a day. Theatricality, that is. The trouble is, now we've just premiered our next musical *Pencoweth*, which tours to Cornwall's world-famous cliff-top Minack theatre in May this year.

So to all medics who are also county sportsmen or women, business entrepreneurs, political sages, artists, IT impresarios, or dancers, join me in thanking the mental nourishment that medicine brings to keep us inspired to do all that 'other stuff'.

And what happened to Rob and Steph?

They rediscovered general practice as well.

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Percy and Bevan face the ultimate price as the villagers look on. World premiere of *The Decent Rogues* Bath, 2011.

