

Why I did an MBA

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Last summer, after being Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon for 11 years, I graduated (with distinction!) with an MBA from Keele University. Before starting, like many Orthopaedic Surgeons, I thought I had a fair idea of management. The major change in my thinking following my MBA is how different leadership and management are.

As doctors, we sometimes consider the two together but I now feel they are almost opposites. A leader has vision; ambition and is inspirational; a manager makes sure that everything is in order. To take on a leadership role needs some managerial skills, and a good manager needs to have a leader's support. Yin needs yang.

I started the MBA course when I had just taken on the additional role of Director of Medical Education for my Trust. At the interview for the post, I was told that I lacked management experience, so I decided to go on a course. My view then was that an MBA was the Gold standard, so for a little extra effort, I might have a recognisable qualification with an academic focus.

Why Keele University?

I chose Keele University as their MBA programme is specifically health focussed. At the time it was 50% doctors and 50% health service managers, so great conversations occurred during breaks and after dinner. I also knew

that for me a residential course (one week per module) would suit my learning style. I had previously done the Keele short course in "Medical Management for surgical Senior Registrars" in 1999 and remember changing my perception of NHS processes over just a few days last century.

Other options

There are day release MBA courses and on-line courses. I had previously done an MA in Clinical Education (Brighton University 2006), which was day release, with five different days each term comprising one module. On the day release course, returning to emails, re-scheduled patients and children after just one day away was difficult. Those with specific gaps might prefer short courses on being an effective Medical Manager, Financial Management, business planning or project management.

The practicalities (time, money and distance)

My course was a series of seven residential modules, arriving Sunday evening and leaving on Friday afternoon. For that week, I could immerse myself in academia. Each module was followed by a 4,000 word essay.

It costs around £10,000 for the whole programme. I received £1,000 from KSS Deanery and £2,500 from my Trust. Although I negotiated exceeding my study leave time, I never took this up as I realised I had forgotten to take my full Annual leave allowance.

I would aim to do one or two evenings' work during the week, but discussions at the bar were often more appealing and more educational. The accommodation costs could often be claimed from Trust study leave expenses and trains booked in advance were cheapest. I travelled by train each time, aiming to get the bones of the assignment sorted on the journey home each Friday night (four hours of travel from Stoke-on-Trent to Eastbourne). I tended to put my bike on the train and cycle the seven miles to Keele University from Stoke-on-Trent station, to make up for missing normal Karate sessions.

Modules

The MBA is billed as a four year program, with seven taught modules over seven terms, followed by a 15,000-word dissertation. The cohort was mostly the same, although a few people joined for modules they had missed, and some did all the taught modules and the dissertation in one year as a full time MBA.

The modules:

Health Policy and Strategy
Policy formulation, implementation and review. Future planning. International comparisons. Explanations of failures and successes.

Management of Human Resources
Recruitment, workforce planning, staff retention, appraisal and review, Employment law. Performance management. >>

Economics and Management
Key concepts and methodologies of health economics. How to plan using economic models.

Management science
How complex systems function. Business planning. Carrying risk. Institutional memory, receptiveness to change.

Accounting and Financial Management
Budgets, depreciation, costs, use of resources and financial information systems.

Operations Management
How to manage details, especially around processes, avoiding waste: six sigma, theory of constraints, LEAN, queuing theory.

Research for Managers, Clinicians and Policy-Makers
How to conduct management research, analysis, evaluation, methods for dissertation.

Dissertation

There is close email supervision from your supervisor. I was helped by a change in research ethics guidelines that meant questionnaire surveys of NHS staff no longer needed detailed ethics approval.

My Dissertation

I chose streamlining the care of patients with wrist fractures as my dissertation. This addressed process management, theory of constraints, organisational theory and change management. The project was around conworking events that occur fairly randomly over 168 hours per week (wrist fractures) into an urgent quasi-elective process (fracture clinics over



Scarlett at her graduation supported by her children

15 hours per week and day case trauma list operating). I focussed on empowerment of staff and patient education. I held focus groups and we wrote information leaflets together which became a tool for staff education.

What I got out of it

I learned how to support and develop staff, services and institutional culture. People treat

me differently if you have an MBA. Maybe choosing an MBA, and sticking with it, was just stubbornness? Or that a decade of long hours, followed by another of working and child-rearing meant that I needed to have more challenges than just the day job?

On a national level, I have developed ideas from a module on change management, empowerment and education into a national report for the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. This is aimed at encouraging behaviour change to increase physical activity. I gained insight into the structure of Masters' programmes, which has been invaluable in my other roles, accrediting some courses and developing others with Brighton & Sussex Medical School and the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

A surgeon with an MBA and a bit of management experience and good managerial help would be fantastic at running a Trust or any other organisation. My MBA taught me to understand where to start, especially around valuing staff and understanding money. With so many changes in the NHS now and in the future, we need more surgeons with awareness of how things get done. ■

I have had a chance to work out why things are done, how to value staff and get things to work better. At a local level, my MBA has been a



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