

Reality Bites! The Transition From Medical Training to Professional Employment

By Karoon C. Danayan, MD, FRCPC, FAAP

As medical trainees, our lives revolve around treating patients with complex medical issues, intensely studying medical literature, and attempting to balance our lives outside of medicine in the meantime. Generally, one's thoughts are not focused on future professional employment.

My decision to study pediatrics and later, pediatric rheumatology, at The University of Toronto was based on pure passion for this area of medicine. Honestly, I did not consider the potential of no job at the end of my training in the equation. However, within a year of my fellowship training, reality quickly set in – I had acquired significant student debt, a first home, and a second child. My pragmatic mind thus took control and I began to research future employment opportunities upon graduation.

I began aggressively networking within the rheumatology community, considering both academic and community-based positions, as well as a blend of pediatrics and pediatric rheumatology. I focused on areas where both my husband and I could find fruitful employment and live close to our extended families. I set up electives in academic centres with good infrastructure, a sufficiently large population base to benefit from my subspecialty, and a paucity of pediatric rheumatologists. The adult rheumatologists in these centers were tremendously supportive; moreover, senior rheumatologists at The Hospital for Sick Children involved me in the triage process, studying where referrals were being generated in the Greater Toronto Area, thus helping me identify underserved areas close to home. Thereafter, I connected with the directors of pediatrics in



Dr. Karoon Danayan leads Rouge Valley Health System's first pediatric rheumatology clinic.

specific community-based academic hospitals needing my subspecialty services, and delivered grand rounds on a topic of interest to their pediatric hospitals. In the end, I attempted to create not one, but several potential future employment options for myself. The reality is that many of these opportunities did not flourish due to financial, practical, or political reasons.

Within two years of graduation, I was able to secure a part-time staff position at Rouge Valley Centenary Hospital as a pediatric rheumatologist, serving an underserved area in

my subspecialty, relieving part of the patient workload from our tertiary medical centre, all while receiving excellent support from the staff, especially the pediatric rheumatology team at The Hospital for Sick Children. However, a weekly rheumatology clinic would not be financially sustainable alone. I was fortunate to join a busy, private pediatric practice in downtown Toronto where I receive the majority of my income; I am involved in medical research and teaching core pediatrics to family medicine residents from The University of Toronto.

My success stems from perseverance, focus, adaptability, and mentorship from critical individuals who helped shape my career. I understood well what I wanted to achieve and created my own opportunities.

*Karoon C. Danayan, MD, FRCPC, FAAP
Pediatrician and Specialist in Rheumatology,
Rouge Valley Centenary Hospital
Toronto, Ontario*