

When in Rome...



Welcome to New Zealand. Godzone. Paradise on earth.

You have chosen to come 'down under' – a great move! You have joined a growing body of UK doctors who have seen the light and realised that the British Isles can no longer offer doctors the life or career they pursue. For some, it is the training opportunities; for others, the chance to enjoy unrivalled outdoor sports or other activities. For many, it is a much-needed change of scene after a six or seven-year hard slog to get full GMC registration. A chance to jump off the treadmill of professional development and just have a year's working holiday – why not? There is also a percentage of us who plan to stay permanently, to make New Zealand our home, recognising the many benefits of life here versus life in the modern UK.

Whatever the reason you are here, and however transient you may be, you have become part of the fabric of the community of doctors here in New Zealand. You are welcome too! And your help is much needed.

But let's just think on a few things. The quality of life you enjoy here, the work-life balance and all-round equitable culture you marvel at, did not arise from nowhere. Do you remember being in the UK? Do you remember what it was like not to be able to take annual leave? Do you remember when study leave funding was scrapped for SHOs? Do you remember when SHOs were scrapped? Do you remember working 20 hours' free overtime per week as routine? Do you remember missing that wedding or funeral? Do you remember applying for jobs on a computer system that published your sexual orientation on the internet? Do you remember being offered a crap job in Timbuktu for tuppence an hour and being told to consider yourself lucky? Do you remember how no one cared?

Every time you swipe your ID card for lunch, or go to teaching, or get adequate rest after nights, or even when you can finish work on time, you are eating the fruits of other people's labour. Our kiwi cousins, who welcome us into their hospitals and their country, have fought for 25 years for the conditions you currently enjoy. It has not always been pretty. Some of our predecessors have made considerable sacrifice on our behalf, so that each new generation of RMOs may be better off than the last.

The RDA has grown in strength over time, whilst its nearest 'equivalent' in the UK, the godforsaken BMA, folded and betrayed its members. We UK grads have continued to work tirelessly to fulfil our responsibilities, but have forgotten what it is to have rights. We neglected ourselves, and those who would follow us.

The RDA works because we have a strong collective conscience. We are 'all in'. It's a bit like herd immunity. There will always be a few misguided but well-meaning parents who do not vaccinate their children. Likewise, there will always be doctors among us who do not become members. Those doctors reap the benefits of immunity, but do nothing in return.

So what can you do? You may argue that it is hardly worth your while, that you'll only be here six months, or a year, or whatever. I would disagree with that. I would say the best thing you could do would be to leave your apathy at Heathrow. You are here now. You are part of the NZ doctors dynamic. I would encourage you to do your bit. To sign up to the RDA for the collective good. To show support for the union which has created the kind of work environment you could never have hoped for back home. If you are not here for a full year then join on a monthly basis. Stand up and be counted.

Doctors in New Zealand sadly currently face the same threats to their careers and autonomy which faced us in Britain first in 2007 (MMC). The RDA intends to fight this to the bitter end. Your support now is more important than ever.

Are you with us?

Yours, a proud (UK) member of the NZRDA

Lorraine Davison
Wellington Rep & National Exec. Member