

Dana Thomas

Finding the work life balance you want

Dana had completed a BA before entering medicine and was a bit older than most of her classmates. At the very beginning of her third year as a house officer – a tricky time in terms of thinking about future specialties – Dana was at the stage of thinking about children, and wanting a family life. She was struggling at the time with a very tough House Surgeon run, and feeling out of depth, stressed and unsupported. She approached Support Services for assistance with the situation and was moved back to general medicine.

“It helped a bit, but didn’t solve the problem, because I was looking for a nine to five life that would allow me to have a family”. Dana then applied for a job as a writer with a pharmaceutical journal.

“Having completed a BA, I had good writing skills. However when I was offered the job, I didn’t take it – it wasn’t quite right, and the income was less.”

Then she met an Information Services (IS) Project Analyst from Middlemore Hospital who was looking for a successor, as he was moving on to Orion Health. The IS department required a junior doctor to help prepare people for ongoing software innovation; the role was to act as a ‘translator’ between IT departments and clinicians. Dana noted that she was “not very technical”, her job was to help the clinicians understand what they were trying to achieve with the software. It was a job offering Monday to Friday, 8am–5pm hours. *“I couldn’t believe how lucky I was.”*

Dana likens it to being as business analyst, it required skills in observation, interviewing and documenting; however, as she points out, doctors are trained and skilled in these areas. Her work was with a wide range of hospital users, not only doctors but nurses, physiotherapists and pharmacists, so the role required empathy and sufficient clinical understanding of these other roles.

“My baseline clinical background means I am where I am today.”

Dana also had to learn to understand technical people and their professional language, but as she says, *“doctors know how to learn, they are constantly researching new knowledge”.*

The job changed over time into a change management role and Dana found this was her passion. Hospital management was struggling to get new systems implemented, and wanted to influence the young doctors to learn these. Dana worked with clinician leaders to get junior doctors engaged with IT. Some of the work was about changing their behaviour, and some about making small changes to the software to provide best use for the department. *“I was an intermediary.”*

Dana’s first child was born at this time, and she began looking for work which provided an opportunity for part time hours, and more challenge. A previous boss was working for Orion Health, she was familiar with some Orion products and had connections with this company. Dana became a clinical Consultant with Orion Health.

The job offered a two-day week, provided the much needed flexibility for a mother of a nine month old baby. It also offered opportunities to travel. *“This was exciting,”* said Dana, *“you don’t always get these in medicine.”*

The role was still as a *'Translator,'* but now Dana was representing the clinicians, and acting as a *"subject matter expert."*

Dana now has three children, and has been in this role for seven years. She has had time off when required, and the work has fulfilled her need for work life balance. In considering the satisfying factors about this work, she notes the flexibility and family friendly workplace. *"All of the senior people here have large families, and are empathic to family needs."*

In considering factors of personal satisfaction in the work, Dana explains her enjoyment of the special nature of her job. She considers that one of the reasons people go into medicine is the sense of being special – but it takes a long time and a lot of work to achieve this in a traditional clinician role. In her current role, she says, *"I am the only person here who can do what I do, and there are only a handful of people in the country that do this. I like that."*

Her work also offers constant ongoing challenge, and opportunities. It has its frustrations at times, but Dana thrives on the activity, *"I love to be busy."*

Dr Dana Thomas currently works as a Clinical Consultant and Product Manager for Orion Health.