

## General Practice in the North of Scotland

I grew up on the Highland boundary line, in west Stirlingshire, and during my university days developed keen interests in hillwalking and traditional Highland music. I felt destined, therefore, to live and work in the Highlands after graduating from medical school. Realising from an early stage that general practice is the best job in the world, I applied for and was accepted to a pre-registration house officer rotation based in Inverness including four months in general practice. This then led to an incredible opportunity to take part in a pilot scheme for specialist training in general practice, where all of my post-graduate training was based in primary care and experience of hospital specialties was gained through a multitude of short secondments.

Since completing my training in January 2007, I have worked as a freelance GP throughout the North of Scotland. I have a home base in Inverness, capital of the Highlands, and the nature of my work provides unrivalled opportunities to experience the best of everything the Highlands have to offer. During the past couple of years, I have been a privileged guest in numerous unique and contrasting communities from Wester Ross to Aberdeenshire and from the Shetland Isles to the Isle of Bute.

Many practices in remote and rural areas have only one or two full-time GPs, so there is always a need for short-term locum doctors to provide holiday cover in such places. Working as a locum has its pros and cons, the balance of which certainly suits some people more than others. For me, so far, it has provided the perfect lifestyle as I am able to pick and choose when I am available and can fit work around other interests. I love the opportunity to visit so many different places where, on arrival, I am instantly afforded the privilege and respect of being a temporary advocate of the people and their community, whilst being responsible for the whole-person care of every patient I see.

There are many communities around the North of Scotland where I could happily settle one day, as a permanent GP; I have even been offered several permanent jobs without having applied for them, sometimes before they have been advertised. For now, however (and mainly for selfish reasons) I am quite content with the freedom and flexibility of being a freelance Highland GP. The Highlands are a great place to live, Inverness is an exciting and vibrant city with good transport links, and general practice is the best job in the world.

Dr Graeme Walker

Freelance GP & Honorary Secretary of the RCGP North of Scotland Faculty