

#MonthlyMotivation: Charlotte Griffiths (class of 2010)



Charlotte excelled in her GP exams, becoming a top military candidate. Since qualifying as a GP in 2015, she has worked at two shore establishments and is now the Principle Medical Officer at HMS EXCELLENT which is home to the Navy Command Headquarters.

"In my current role, I run the practice which looks after 1400 military personnel on the base. I have a team of military and civilian staff who work for me ensuring that all personnel have access to the highest medical care possible. Working as a GP in the Royal Navy differs from the NHS. Our population is generally younger, we do a lot of occupational health; looking at whether they are fit for their roles and how we can ensure they stay as fit as possible so that they can deploy at short notice as required." Future roles may include working in the headquarters or deploying globally on a range of submarines or ships such as HMS Queen Elizabeth, the new aircraft carrier.

For Charlotte Griffiths (née Wake) her military adventure started when she left Putney High School in 2000. After an adventurous gap year both in India and sailing on a Tall Ship from the Azores to the UK, she went to Newcastle University to study Medicine.

Whilst studying she considered her career options. "I was attracted to the Royal Navy as it offered the chance to combine medicine with leadership roles and travel. I was keen to go to sea and was drawn to the challenge of delivering healthcare in a variety of situations and locations. The roles offered a high degree of autonomy at a relatively junior stage. Although this was a daunting prospect, I was confident that I would receive the necessary training and support."

Whilst at Newcastle she joined the University Royal Naval Unit, through this she spent time at sea and in Royal Navy medical centres so to get an insight into the role she was considering.

Charlotte graduated with a distinction and then completed her two years of medical foundation jobs in Portsmouth before undergoing Officer training at Britannia Royal Naval College. "This was physically extremely challenging, whilst I had enjoyed sport at school, I was more likely to be found in the music block than the gym, so I had to work hard to pass the physical elements." Following this she completed further military medical training, for example learning how to rescue people from engine spaces, how to evacuate patients using helicopters, and how to manage trauma casualties on a ship, all skills which are very different from usual NHS work.

Her first ship was in the Northern Gulf, providing training to the Iraqi Navy, "this was a fascinating role, only two years out of medical school, and I was providing medical care to British, American and Iraqi military personnel, on a variety of ships and oil platforms. I also was involved in delivering medical training to the Iraqis and as a result, visited their base in Iraq."

Following a short stint in the UK, she was back on a ship, again headed to the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. "During this trip we visited the majority of the Gulf States. I often had to take patients to medical facilities ashore, so I got to experience how healthcare was delivered in a variety of settings." A further period in the UK (during which she got married) was followed by joining a ship in the Falklands "having experienced two summers in the Gulf, it was a relief to experience winter in the Falklands! We transited through the Patagonian Canal and then up the Pacific coast to Peru. It was a fascinating trip with amazing scenery, at points we were so remote, I felt very privileged to be visiting a part of the world few get to see."



Following three years of sea going roles, Charlotte started her specialist training in Primary Care, "I was attracted to the variety and diversity of the role. During my training I had the opportunity to work at DMRC Headley court, looking after complex trauma patients such as triple amputees and severe spinal injuries. This was fascinating, I felt humbled by my patients who everyday strove to overcome their injuries."

"I did not follow the usual career path from medical school. I have many years ahead of me as a GP and I certainly don't regret spending three years at sea, in fact it has been the highlight of my career. Despite not being a natural athlete, I never doubted that I would be able to succeed with the physical elements of the training, I think this self believe came in part from the supportive environment we had at Putney High School, where you were encouraged to always aim high and strive for achievement across the fields.

"Getting into Medical School is always challenging, however I felt that I had the support of my teachers who helped me prepare so that I stood the best possible chance. I volunteered for my final four years at School at the Royal Hospital for Neuro Disability, this gave me a real insight into medicine, which short work experience placements may not offer. If people are considering a career in the Military then I would recommend joining a University Unit to gain some experience initially. It is a big choice to make but one which can be extremely rewarding and exciting."