

# Access to the Professions ~~Reach Scotland~~



## Case Study: Gilly Fleming

**Gilly went to St David's R.C. High School in Dalkeith. She was took part in Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS) and Access to the Professions Medicine. She completed her Medicine degree at the University of Edinburgh in 2012.**

### **What attracted you to studying Medicine at Edinburgh?**

I have always been interested in picking up clues and solving puzzles. When I was first at high school, I actually wanted to be a police officer/detective and to use those skills to solve crimes. Somebody then mentioned to me that being a doctor is a bit like being a detective – you can almost always make a diagnosis by talking to the patient (getting a statement) and examining the patient (examining the crime scene!).

Medicine is often about piecing together bits of information using pattern recognition to come to a diagnosis. It is the aspect of medicine that I most enjoy and find challenging. I was also keen on the idea of interacting with patients and their families, and meeting people with varied social and cultural backgrounds.

### **How did LEAPS and Access to the Professions help you in your decision making process?**

Before I applied to Medicine, I didn't know any doctors. I was the first in my family to consider Medicine as a career and didn't have any friends or relatives that were doctors. Most of what I knew about medicine I had picked up from TV shows like Casualty and ER (which make it out to be much more glam than it actually is!), and I had no real understanding of what the job actually involved.

Attending Access to the Professions events was my introduction to the world of Medicine and what it actually entailed. I was able to hear first hand from doctors as to their daily experiences on the wards, and see the variety of career pathways available to people who had chosen to become a doctor.

It also allowed me to meet school students who were also considering applying to medicine – as I was the only pupil in my school applying, sometimes I felt a bit alone in the application process. Some of the people I met through the Access to the Professions programme became some of my best friends throughout university.

In terms of the application process, I found the LEAPS programme invaluable. I was able to meet with a LEAPS advisor who talked me through the process, and was able to give me advice as to what they were looking for in an ideal application. I attended a pre-application interview where we went through my application to ensure I was in the best possible position to get a place. I strongly believe that without their input I might not have been successful in gaining a place at university.

I am extremely grateful for their input and now, as a doctor, realise that they play a very important role in making medicine.

### **What have been the best and the worst things about studying Medicine at Edinburgh so far?**

Firstly, I would say that I LOVE my job and becoming a doctor was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

University is hard. Medicine is a difficult course due to the volume of new information that you need to learn, and a lot of work is required. It will often seem that students who are studying other courses are having more fun than you are – and at times, they probably are!

The standards expected of you are much higher, and it is important that you uphold the professional standards expected of someone who is training to be a doctor. However, you will get to meet a huge variety of people from different backgrounds, some of whom will become your best friends. There is also the opportunity to be taught by inspiring and engaging doctors, many of whom will shape the kind of doctor you will become.



Overwhelmingly the best part of my job is seeing patients and their families. As doctors, we are given the privilege of becoming involved with the lives of our patients, who often open up to us when they are at their most vulnerable. It is an extremely rewarding feeling to be able to listen to patient concerns, ease suffering with treatments, and improve quality of life.

I also enjoy that no day in Medicine is ever the same. Each patient comes with their own unique physical, social and cultural make-up and no two presentations are ever identical. Most days I leave my job having come across something which is entirely new to me! I love seeing new and interesting pathology and it never ceases to fascinate me the things that can go wrong with the body and the way we can adapt to it.

As with all jobs, there are bits of Medicine which are a bit rubbish. The hours are long, often anti-social, and you often end up missing the life events of family and friends! Training continues long past graduation which involves sitting several post graduate examinations which are very expensive and difficult to pass. There is often a lot of paperwork, which at times can feel as though it is detracting from actually looking after the patients.

Many people find the responsibility of decisions in Medicine difficult to handle. There are not many professions where the consequences of a decision could mean harm to another person, and the thought that your actions could mean serious harm to a patient is a difficult concept to get your head around.

### **How have you found balancing study alongside University life?**

I had great fun at university, but I also worked hard. For me, it was important to work consistently to ensure I was up to date with lectures and tutorials, and this meant that around exam time, I already understood most of the information and I only needed to consolidate it.

It took me a while to get into the groove of things and to understand which methods of studying suited me best, but I had great support in doing this. I enjoyed revising with friends as it was both educational and social at the same time.

Throughout the time I spent at university, I made sure that I had a couple of days a week where I would do no studying in an attempt to maintain my sanity – instead on those days, I would see family, watch rubbish TV, or head out with friends.

### **What are you currently doing and what your plans for your future career?**

I was fortunate enough to do well at University and graduated with honours in June of 2012. I currently work as a Senior House Officer in the Neonatal Intensive care unit at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, looking after small and sick babies, many of whom weigh less than a bag of sugar! It is an exciting and fast paced job which suits my personality well. In the long term, I hope to become an anaesthetist and work in an intensive care environment, with critically unwell patients. My application to become an anaesthetic trainee is in the next couple of weeks, and I feel the same anxiety I did when applying to Medicine all those years ago!

