



WHEN IN AOTEAROA

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE NZRDA TO NEWLY ARRIVED RESIDENT DOCTORS FROM THE UK & IRELAND

Welcome to Aotearoa, New Zealand, Land of the Long White Cloud. I am the President of the NZRDA (NZ Resident Doctors' Association/RDA) and a training paediatric registrar but was born in Glasgow and went to medical school in Dundee, Scotland. After my first couple of years working in Edinburgh, I moved to Aotearoa where I have lived for the past 7 years. I joined the RDA on arrival and went on strike for our safer rosters campaign shortly afterwards. The working terms and conditions we have here are special and require work to stop them being gradually taken away.

You have chosen to come 'down under' – a great move! You are part of a long line of UK and Irish doctors who have seen the light and realised that the British and Irish healthcare systems no longer offer doctors the life or career they pursue. For some, it is the training opportunities and ability to give patients more time and care; for others, the chance to enjoy unrivalled outdoor activities and adventures; from the mountains of the South Island to the beaches in the North.

For many, it is a much-needed change of scene and breath of fresh air 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 who plan to stay permanently, to make New Zealand our home, recognising the many benefits of life here versus life in the UK or Ireland. Some of us start as the former and become the latter...

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

With this move, and in joining the community, there are a few things to consider. The quality of professional life you enjoy here, the work-life balance and drive for equitable medical culture that drew you here did not arise from nowhere. Do you remember being in the UK or Ireland? Do you remember what it was like not to be able to take annual leave when you needed it? Do you remember working extensive hours of "free" overtime per week as routine? Do you remember missing that wedding or funeral? Do you remember being moved around the country without choice? Do you remember covering for absent colleagues without compensation or being expected to pick up extra shifts without agreement? Do you remember how no one cared?

Every time you swipe your ID card for a "free" lunch, go to teaching, get adequate rest after nights, work no more than 10 days or 4 nights in a row, have a rostered day off after working the weekend or even when you finish work on time, you are standing on the shoulders of RMOs who have fought for improving and maintaining working conditions. Our kiwi colleagues and those that have come before



you, who welcome us into their hospitals and their country, have fought for over 30 years for the conditions you currently enjoy. It has not always been easy. Our predecessors have made considerable sacrifices on our behalf, so that each new generation of RMOs may be better off than the last. This continuous improvement is the driving force of the RDA.

The RDA works because we have a strong collective conscience. We are 'all in' for everyone. In the workplace this looks a little like herd immunity. There are always some misinformed or misguided people who choose to be unvaccinated. Likewise, there will always be doctors among us who do not become members or choose to join a union that does not progress or protect improvements in working terms and conditions. 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 two. I would disagree with that. You are here now, and 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 we have lost in the UK and Ireland. To be clear the union that has worked, achieved and continues to stand up for our community is the NZRDA.

If you are not here for a full year then join on a monthly basis. But regardless of how you sign up, you should stand up and be counted.

Doctors in New Zealand sadly currently face the same threats to their careers and autonomy which have eroded the working life of doctors in the UK and Ireland. The RDA intends to fight this to the bitter end. For Doctors and for the patients we care for. Your support now is more important than ever.

Are you with us?

Yours, a proud (Scottish and now New Zealand citizen) member of the NZRDA,
Dr. James Anderson
President of the NZRDA

