

Medicine proves fertile ground for Nicole

Dr Nicole Burger is an avid gardener outside of medicine who passionately believes in a work-life balance for junior doctors



Dr Nicole Burger
Co-Chair, Doctors in Training Practice Group

Why did you join the AMA (WA)?

I joined the AMA (WA) from my internship year, perhaps even during medical school, because I feel so strongly that we are more powerful as a profession if we are unified and speak with one voice on common issues. I see the advantages of being in the AMA – being at the forefront of what's happening in the healthcare system and being able to make some changes.

Why did you join the AMA (WA) Council?

As a member, I got to participate in many groups, such as the latest Industrial Agreement negotiations. I was a member of the Bargaining Committee for the Child and Adolescent Health Service, and I am a member of the Telehealth Review Committee. From that, I've had meetings with the Health Minister and become more involved in policy and governance, so I felt that joining Council would be the next natural progression.

Why did you choose your specialty?

I'm a paediatric doctor, and training in general paediatrics as well as adolescent medicine. I chose paediatrics very early in my career. I remember in medical school, on paediatric rotations, I would drive into the placement excited and interested about the day. Nothing else quite piqued my interest as much as paediatrics, particularly the work I do now, with a strong mental health focus and holistic approach to healthcare.

What would you tell a young doctor looking to work in your specialty?

I'd say the most important thing would be to find your passion and your people: the people you see that you'd be happy to have your life turn out that way; and the people you get along well with, because you spend so much of your life and your working day with your colleagues. So, I would swing towards a specialty where you're comfortable.

What has had the greatest impact on your area of practice?

From the impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns, we've seen a significant increase in mental health presentations – both in eating disorders (which is a large part of the work I do) and

also in other mental health issues, and the importance of social connection and family structure.

Are there any heroes or mentors who've guided your path so far?

I think I've been very lucky to be mentored by my entire adolescent medicine team, who've guided me not only in clinical management but also in work-life balance.

What's the first issue you'd tackle if you were WA Minister for Health?

As Minister for Health, with a wholesome and healthy budget, I would like to focus on mental health issues; and have mental health under Medicare without having long wait lists – plus easy access to autism and ADHD diagnoses for people of all ages.

How do you spend and prioritise your time away from medicine?

I've always believed that my work is just that – not really my 9-to-5, but my 8am to 5pm. And I'm quite glad that I have a



Nicole immersed in one of her favourite hobbies – gardening.



Nicole's gardening work in progress.

lot of other hobbies. I'm an avid gardener. I have 20 different types of tomatoes growing in my garden, all grown from seed. But generally, just spending time outdoors, social connection, being with friends and family.

If you weren't a doctor, what would you be?

I was always quite interested in genetics and the genetics of families. So perhaps I would have been a geneticist, or someone involved in family planning. Or a gardener. I think I'd be a great gardener, working on a farm.

What's something your parents impressed upon you?

I was very lucky. My parents have always told me I could do whatever I set my mind to, and that there was never any harm in trying and giving anything my best go. And that's something I've carried throughout my life. If there's something I'm interested in, I will give it a try. I think this attitude has been very helpful growing up. My parents are always incredibly supportive of whatever passion or interest I may have, no matter how fleeting it may be. They would be my number one supporters.

What's your life mantra?

It's always worth giving something a go, and it doesn't matter if it doesn't work out.

What are you most passionate about?

Apart from gardening, I think it would be junior doctor wellbeing and making sure everyone has some passions and fulfilment outside of their workplace.

Who or what inspires you?

I don't really have one set person who inspires me. I guess I'm inspired by the people I meet every day; every patient I come across; and the privilege of hearing their stories and understanding their journeys.

What's your ideal holiday destination?

Currently, Italy, given that I went there for a month last year. Ideally, it would really be seeing my family in Peru and South America and having an extended holiday back there. My parents live with me in Perth, but they are from Peru. Growing up, pre-COVID, we'd go every three years or so. ■

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