

Dr Geeta Trehan

“This is my painting, my canvas”

Geeta is a specialist General Practitioner and medical educator, based in Campbelltown, with fellowships of the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

Geeta grew up with three sisters and a brother in Ludhiana, Punjab in India. Her father was a mathematician and instilled in his children the benefits of a good education. While still at school, Geeta developed a love of writing and had wanted to be a journalist. Her father however persuaded her that she should study medicine and she enrolled in the Christian Medical College, Ludhiana. Founded in 1894, the College was then the first medical school for women in Asia and became one of the of India’s top medical schools. Geeta enrolled in 1983 and was the top graduate when she completed her Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) in 1988. She then completed a Master of Surgery (MS) qualification at Punjab University in 1991. She is also a graduate of the National Academy of Medical Sciences, India. Geeta worked as a surgeon and general practitioner in India for the next 14 years. She worked mostly with poorer sections of the community in a Charitable Hospital and remembers that she found her work satisfying and it fulfilled her need to help her patients who could ill afford any medical treatment. At the same time she became aware of social evils particularly the issues of child exploitation, which she exposed.

Geeta’s husband is a surgeon whom she met while they were doing their postgraduate degree. The family decided to migrate to Australia in 2004. The decision to leave her country was not an easy one especially as she was providing healthcare to underprivileged sections of society, but the decision to migrate was prompted by the desire to give her children a safer and more secure future. Punjab was the hub of terrorist activities, there was considerable social and political upheaval and the rate of crime was increasing.

The family spent two years in Coober Pedy and another year in the Riverland and it was during this period that Geeta developed her interest in the practice of rural and remote medicine. She completed her fellowships of the Royal College of General Practitioners (2006) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

In 2008 the family moved to Adelaide where Geeta worked in other medical practices until opening her own surgery in Campbelltown in 2019. She loves practicing general practice in Australia and believes that her role as a doctor is to help people and that it is unethical to say ‘no’. Among her specialties are geriatrics and chronic diseases.

In an article published in the RACGP Newsletter in 2017, Geeta says that ‘the workings of the human body fascinates me. I feel a person has to be seen as a whole and general practice is the only specialty [that enables doctors] to treat a person and not a disease. The treatment has to be tailored to suit the individual’s needs, taking into account their social and cultural background.’

Geeta says that she is continually learning, something new every day in her practice, either about medicine or about being a more perceptive and better person. 'General practice enchants me, because of the challenges it provides, and the opportunity to learn something new and to grow everyday'. She believes that the personal contact with patients is important and leads to quality practice.

She believes that her greatest reward being a general practitioner (GP) comes from helping another human being, whether it is relieving physical pain, counselling grief or sharing joy. The rewards for her include that 'every time a child comes running at me across the treatment room, it makes me feel like a celebrity'. It is a unique opportunity to practice medicine in its vastness and still be able to keep your special interest without confining yourself to a small segment of medical practice'.

Geeta is actively involved in professional associations and she holds several roles in the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). She has been a faculty member of the RACGP (SA and NT) Board since 2015 and was a member of the National Expert Committee for Pre-fellowship Training. She also chaired the RACGP (SA and NT) Education and Training Committee from 2015-2019. In addition, she is a member of the Australian Government Professional Services Review Panel since May 2022. She holds the post of Senior Clinical Lecturer with the University of Adelaide and is involved in teaching medical students from Flinders University as well as Adelaide University. She is also a supervisor and educator for the fellowship program for the RACGP and has been a college examiner for several years.

Geeta has a passion for teaching international medical graduates to obtain their Australian medical qualifications, something she has been involved in since 2008. Transitioning to a new environment can be difficult for these graduates. She finds it very rewarding when they contact her to let her know that they have passed their exams and can practice in Australia - as a result of the help she has been able to provide them. Although Geeta spent more than 10 years as a surgeon, general practice is now her niche, providing her with opportunities that at first hand help provide better lives for her patients.

She also has considerable pride and satisfaction that both her sons have followed her and her husband and are also medical professionals. Looking back she agrees with her father that taking advantage of educational opportunities is critical to future success. She remembers that her medical teachers were 'brilliant and kind and of the highest professional ethics' and she now appreciates the high standards they set her.

After the practice doors are closed Geeta enjoys going to the gym with her husband, cooking, reading and writing poetry. She believes that she has lived the life she wanted and would not make any different choices. In the words of her poem 'The girl I used to be':

*'...slip her hand in mine
Bridging the chasm of time
A look of contentment on her face
Her eyes alight with a knowing pride
The little girl I used to be
Happy with her destiny.'*