

# Success in academic primary care: interview with Dr Matthew Ridd

## Reader in Primary Healthcare, Bristol Medical School

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Despite his relaxed appearance and no-shoes-at-work policy, Dr Matthew Ridd is a busy GP, researcher and lecturer at the University of Bristol, specialising in skin problems and patient-doctor relationships. His down-to-earth approach and enthusiasm for teaching has seen him supervise numerous successful INSPIRE award recipients, all of whom now have publications and conference presentations to their name.

lives'. Of course, most of us won't find the cure for cancer, but we'll all be contributing to the knowledge base and, hopefully, change things for the better.

### What are the difficulties of a career in research?

It's definitely not an easy career option but you need to think of it in terms of the long game. It probably is tougher earlier on, getting your clinical career and postgraduate exams sorted whilst fitting in the academic work alongside. But if that research really is what you're interested in, then that will help you to be happy as a doctor on your clinical days. You've got 30/40 years of working life to enjoy so it is a long game. That's true of the research too. If you have a great idea today, it might be 5 years before you get funded, results published and clinical practice changed. It's a different time scale to clinical practice, where you get more short-term wins, but the rewards of research can be greater, just with a longer wait.

### Why do you enjoy supervising INSPIRE students?

I enjoy it since all medical students are clever and bright, so, from the get-go, they already bring lots of skills and knowledge. Whilst I get to teach students through lectures, often INSPIRE is an opportunity to have a slightly longer-term relationship. What's great about INSPIRE projects in particular is the chance for students to develop and get their head around research whilst having ownership of a project.

*Someone once said to me, "doctors who work 30/40 years will change thousands of lives over their career, one patient at a time. If you teach, you'll probably be helping hundreds of thousands of lives because you're teaching the future doctors. But if you do research, potentially it's millions of lives".*

### How did you first get into research?

The truth is: by accident! As a student, I hadn't set out to intercalate, but there was an opportunity to do a funded BSc looking at T-cell signalling. Academic medicine wasn't on my radar at all as a medical student but I actually really enjoyed it and made me think, 'yes I really like the clinical life, but I also like that different mode of thinking, that time to think about one thing in depth'. I had some success with getting data, an abstract, published and haven't looked back since then really, moving from one opportunity to another!

### What do you love most about your job as a clinical academic?

- Variety
- Flexibility
- Making a difference

Variety is definitely one! For example, over the course of the last few weeks I've been to conferences, treating patients, teaching, examining, supervising students and writing up research. Another is the flexibility; for example, if you have a paper that needs writing in 6 months' time, you can decide if you're going to write it now or in 5 months; so you can go with your own style of working.

But an important one is the feeling of making a difference; it's probably a reason a lot of us became doctors. Someone once said to me, "doctors who work 30/40 years will change thousands of lives over their career, one patient at a time. If you teach, you'll probably be helping hundreds of thousands of lives because you're teaching the future doctors. But if you do research, potentially it's millions of

### Your past INSPIRE students have gone on to publish, present at international conferences and win distinguished prizes. What's the secret to the success of your INSPIRE students' projects?

Their success may be no reflection on my supervision whatsoever! I think all medical students are very capable individuals, so it's ultimately about them and support from schemes like INSPIRE. It's a bit of a marriage of interest; if someone comes to me saying they're interested in eczema, I've got the topic knowledge to help guide that into an achievable project. Otherwise, it can be quite difficult if a student has an interest in a disease but they're not quite sure

where the research need is, and to know where they can fit into that, particularly if you've only got a 3–4 week project.

I see it as a symbiotic relationship because students get something out of it, like a presentation or publication, that will stand them in good stead when applying for clinical jobs. Whilst, for me, it's an opportunity to do bits of work which helps move my thinking on or support a bigger piece of research.

### **Would you be happy to host students for INSPIRE days/projects in future?**

Of course!

**Contribution statement** JC conceived the article idea, undertook the interview with Dr Matthew Ridd, edited the piece into the required format and revised it following peer review. JC and Dr Matthew Ridd both provided final permission for the article to be included in the INSPIRE Student Research Journal.

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