

# Ahmed Ali

We were delighted to chat to Ahmed Ali about the journey to pursuing a urological career in the UK and his decision to found the Arabic-British Urological Society.

## You grew up in Iraq and went to university in Baghdad; what drew you to study medicine?

I always dreamt of becoming a doctor; when I grew up in Iraq medicine was the most respected profession and everyone looked up to doctors in admiration. The system in Iraq will default students with high grades to medical school and therefore it's a normal path for students to enter medical school if they achieve high grades at the bachelorette exams.

During studying medicine, I really fell in love with the practical element of the profession, and I found it suited my personality being a fast paced and, at the same time, very rewarding job given that you are helping others who appreciate your care and input.

## What led to you moving to the UK to continue your career? Was this always your plan?

I was born in the UK, and it was always my intention to come back. After the war in 2003 I had to make the difficult choice of leaving my family and friends in the pursuit of a career and life here in the UK.

## Can you tell us a little bit about your initial experience when you first moved to the UK? Both from a personal and professional perspective?

Personally, the initial journey was very difficult; moving to a new country with no friends and family made me feel very lonely. Having said that, there is a large Arab community in the UK which really helped me to adapt and showed me the way to integrate in the system.

Professionally, I had to take a language exam (IELTS) and the PLAB exams to achieve GMC registration. The pathway is very clear on the GMC website and therefore that was a quite easy and straightforward process. I suspect that now, with the advancement of the internet and social media, this is even easier for doctors to navigate.

Then, working and training in the NHS required some further adjustment to life. The continuous travel from one hospital to another throughout the years meant that I was far away from the friends I had in London. However, I found the hospital family of colleagues that quickly became my new friends has really made a massive difference in my life going forward.

## And what made you choose urology as your specialty?

I always felt closer to a surgical specialty than a medical or general practice style of medicine. I also was very lucky to work with a great urologist throughout my training who had a major effect on me as a role model and made urology stand out as a choice of a career.

## Have you found it a welcome and diverse area to work in?

Urology is an example of the NHS; it's a friendly, diverse and nurturing specialty and in my view it's one of the best environments to train and graduate safe doctors. I always found urologists very friendly, easy to approach and ask for help from. Also, I discovered at my earlier stage



of training that the British Association of Urological Surgeons (BAUS) played a major role in my understanding of the pathway I needed to take to become a consultant.

It feels like quite a small community so after a few years you get to know pretty much everyone. Both the regional and national annual meetings offer help in advancing urology training grade doctors by giving them the opportunity to present their work at conferences and also to learn from workshops and their seniors' experience in many different ways beyond clinical training.

## Who has inspired you in your career and why?

I have been lucky to work with many great urologists throughout my career, I feel that I've learned a few things from each and every person I have worked with so I'm very grateful for everyone who has helped me so far. During my foundation years, I still remember Mr Paul Rajjayabun, the person who made urology closer to my heart. He took me under his wing and taught me various procedures in urology which I found very encouraging as a foundation doctor.

Then, during my core surgical training, I was placed at the Yorkshire Deanery. These two years were instrumental in making me consolidate my decision to pursue a career in urology. I had fantastic registrars looking after me such as Miss Mary Garthwaite and Mr Ian Beckley. In addition, I worked very closely with Mr Ian Eardley who

really left a long-lasting impression on my personality given how dedicated he was to urology and training. He supervised my first BAUS presentation and my first publication.

Then, I moved to the south of the country to continue my career. And after finishing my master's degree at UCLH, I was lucky to have a training post at Southampton University Hospital where I worked with a fantastic group of urologists who gave me the final push on the road to become a urologist. I must mention here Professor Bhaskar Somani who really taught me the role of evidence-based medicine and continuous research and development, and its value alongside clinical work. I was able to advance my CV enormously during my time there which helped me secure a national training number. Furthermore, I'm still learning and very lucky to work with an amazing group of urologists at Frimley Park Hospital, who I learn from daily.

## You are the founder of the Arabic-British Urological Society; what led to you setting up the organisation?

This is an idea that I always had in mind, reflecting on how the Arabic medical community could work together to practise safe medicine and help in training successful urologists in the UK. I wanted to create a small society that will help to build bridges between the Arab countries and the UK. I brainstormed the idea with two of my colleagues at the time who interestingly had exactly the same idea in their minds. And therefore, we agreed that we would contact colleagues to see if they were interested in joining this venture. Since our first meeting in 2018 we now have more than 260 members in the society. We have been able to link the Arabic Association of Urology with BAUS having undertaken a very successful Arabic section at the annual BAUS meeting in 2021.

Last year we were able to hold the 1st Arabic Urology Training Bootcamp in Dubai with the help of Mr Shaker Bhayani and BAUS which was highly successful, and we are hoping to hold it annually.

## What initiatives will the society be focusing on in 2025?

2025 will be a busy year! We started with the Arabic Section of Urology at the EAU Annual Meeting in Madrid in March. We

will then be holding the first interactive session at BAUS with representatives from the Arab Association of Urology.

We are planning to hold our second Training Bootcamp in Oman alongside the Arab Association of Urology meeting in November. This is in addition to all the other activities that we hold internally such as training and development courses.

## Would you encourage others to get involved?

The group is made up of all levels of trainees and consultants which means there is a large community that is able to help individuals with any issues they have during their career. I would certainly encourage interested urologists to join as they will find a big family there to welcome them and help them. Looking back through my journey, I would certainly have found such a society to be very helpful to learn from while I was navigating my way through to becoming a urologist.

## And finally, if you have any spare time what do you do to relax?

I certainly now find that work-life balance is very important. I admit that I have had multiple near-burnout events during my career which I didn't recognise at the time. Therefore, I think it's very important for every doctor to find a way to relax from the intensity of our hard-working profession.

I meet with my friends every Monday to play football, which is a sport I really enjoy. We also hold a monthly event where we dedicate a whole day to sports and share a meal together as a way of winding down.

I enjoy travel as well and my wife and I make sure to arrange holidays regularly to visit new countries and learn from their cultures. It is fascinating to interact with the cosmopolitan world we live in.

Many thanks for your time!

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