

INTERVIEW

Dr. Nicholas Mahony



Deciding early that the "rat-race" lacked a certain appeal, Dr. Nicholas Mahony pursued a career that united his passion for medicine with his passion for sport, leading him to his current post as lecturer & M.Sc. Sports Medicine Co-ordinator at TCD

What was your route from medical school to your present position in anatomy?

After finishing my primary degree I wanted to do something different. I wasn't keen on joining the rat-race, and aim to become a GP by my early thirties, or a consultant by my mid thirties. So instead I decided to join the British Royal Navy. I do have family who served in the military, so I did know what was involved. In total I served 6 years as a medical officer.

Following completion of pre-registration in the south west of England my next job was at an air station in Cornwall, this entailed work on the Search and Rescue Helicopter, being lowered onto fishing trawlers in heavy seas is very scary! Thus post house jobs my primary training in the navy involved aviation and underwater medicine and acute clinical care outside of a hospital setting or immediate access to specialist care. This led naturally to work in emergency medicine and along the way I managed to pick up a qualification in family medicine as well.

Life in the Navy always offered new challenges with every new job. I got the chance to work in a variety of roles and unusual places; the submarine escape tank in Portsmouth, at the NATO communications centre in London, and ten months in the middle east shortly before the 1st Gulf War. The varied nature of training in the Navy not only gave me the ability to be a good doctor but also the ability to adapt to different circumstances and a great deal of common sense were as important as other medical skills.

After completing my service I returned to Ireland to complete a Masters in Sports Medicine. I have been working in the anatomy department since 1998, and I am currently completing a PhD in Bone research with Trinity Centre for Bio-Mechanics under the supervision of Profs David Taylor and Clive Lee.

Have you always wanted to be a doctor?

At some level, I have always wanted to be a doctor, in my family my grandfather and aunt were doctors so it was in the blood! I find it very varied and interesting. So, yes, I have always wanted to do this kind of work. But in college I also wanted to have time for my second passion. That is sport. So being able to spend part of my time involved with college rowing was another incentive. Part of the reason I enjoy my job now so much what I do now is due the fact I have been able to combine my medical and sporting interests in a meaningful way.

What do you do in your free time?

Since college I admittedly did not have had much of a social life. I preferred to spend most of my free time rowing, which I did at an international level for many years. I am still involved in training the first team here in Trinity. But after 15 years rowing I have now turned to kayaking. A good move, I'm now pointing in the right direction!

Why did you decide upon sports medicine?

It is a varied and interesting discipline and incorporates my main interests, sports and medicine. My typical day is divided equally between one third clinical, one third teaching and one third research. In the mornings I run exercise performance tests in the Human Performance Laboratory on both elite international level and amateur athletes from all disciplines, from the results of the testing I advise, monitor and manage their individual training programs. I lecture and supervise practical classes in anatomy to both under- and post- graduates. The remainder of my time is spent on his research.

Have you had any regrets to date?

There have been very few regrets career wise. I have taken my time in training and have followed varied career paths and I have had amazing experiences along the way. I think career wise these experiences actually help you in the end.

On a more personal level I suppose I also regret not learning a musical instrument when I was younger, I took up Spanish guitar about 10 years ago and am still struggling with chords and exercises but overall I like the idea pushing myself into a new challenge.

What is your favourite part of the human body?

The manubriosternal notch, have you ever seen 'The English Patient'?

Any advice for up and coming medical students?

To take on board Prof. O'Brien's advice "have a passion or an interest outside of medicine, have a hobby, do some sport work hard and play hard". I think it is important to take free time and do other things in your life outside of medicine. You will learn so much more about life, it will make you a more interesting person with better stories so you won't get so bored when you have to work and talk with different people. ■

▼ Anatomy hall, TCD



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