

# Creative Medical Careers: The interplay of humanities and clinical medicine

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In this podcast Abhi Pal speaks with Ranjana Srivastava about her varied career, in which she has used writing to explore the interplay of humanities and clinical medicine.

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## About Dr Ranjana Srivastava

[Ranjana Srivastava](#) OAM, is an internationally-renowned oncologist and healthcare authority, as well as award-winning author and broadcaster.

Ranjana is a regular columnist for The Guardian newspaper. She is also a health presenter on ABC television and ABC 774 radio. She speaks frequently on health matters, ethics and doctor-patient communication at scholarly and community events. She has appeared at the [Melbourne Writers' Festival](#), the Wheeler Centre for Books and Ideas, the [Sydney Writers' Festival](#), the [Adelaide Festival of Ideas](#), the Williamstown Literary Festival and many other events from an Oncologist

Educated in India, the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, she graduated from Monash University with a first-class honours degree and several awards in medicine. Ranjana undertook her internship, residency and specialist training at various Melbourne hospitals.

In 2004, she won the prestigious [Fulbright Award](#), which she completed at the University of Chicago. She was admitted as a fellow of the [Royal Australasian College of Physicians](#) in 2005 and started practicing oncology in the public hospital system. In 2014 Ranjana was recognised by Monash University as the Distinguished Alumni of the Year. She was also appointed an adjunct associate professor in the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences. Ranjana was included in Westpac's 100 Influential Women of 2015.

Ranjana's writing has been published worldwide, including in Time magazine and The Week, and in medical journals The [New England Journal of Medicine](#), [Lancet](#), [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) and Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care Management. In 2008 her story Ode to a Patient won the Cancer Council Victoria Arts

Award for outstanding writing. Ranjana's inaugural Melbourne Magazine column was featured in the Best Australian Science Writing of 2012.

## About Dr Abhi Pal

Abhi Pal is a Medical Oncology Staff Specialist at Liverpool Hospital, Sydney, Australia. In his non-existent spare time he is completing a part time PhD through Sydney University in informed consent and clinical ethics during [communication with patients](#) with advanced cancer. He has a strong interest in drug development, [clinical trials](#), communication and also in hospital culture, [burnout](#) and [doctor welfare](#).

## Human Factors in Medicine with Dr Ranjana Srivastava

*With Dr Ranjana Srivastava, Melbourne-based Medical Oncologist, writer and public speaker and Order of Australia recipient. She is interviewed by Dr. Abhi Pal, a Medical Oncologist working in Sydney, Australia*

### Introduction

Dr. Ranjana Srivastava is a Medical Oncologist working in Melbourne. She has enjoyed an incredible and varied career, in which she has used writing to explore the interplay of humanities and clinical medicine. She has received two Fulbright scholarships, once for a fellowship in medical ethics and once to study a Master of Public Administration.

### Writing and medicine

- Dr Srivastava's career in writing began when she was encouraged to submit a reflection on her medical student elective in India for publication. After a few difficulties, her report was accepted in The Lancet.
- She appreciates the rigorous editorial process of the major medical journals as the feedback helps to improve writing skills
- Creative outlets are vital for doctors - they provide catharsis and increase the longevity of our careers in medicine. Writing allows doctors to process and discuss difficult things that happen at work
- Writing about medicine (for example, Dr. Srivastava's column in The Guardian) allows doctors to communicate with patients and the public, helping to create change on a broader scale

### Advice for a creative medical career

- Often for junior doctors it seems like the only way to success in medicine is to be a specialist working in a large academic hospital with a busy clinical and research program. That is only one (very narrow) version of success – there are many other models including being successful in other ways (eg. advocacy – Dr Bronwyn King who lobbied superannuation funds to stop investing in tobacco companies)
- Medical careers are often rigid, with emphasis on progression, committing to a specialty and building a CV. Dr. Srivastava discusses managing the sense of inadequacy associated with not pursuing higher degree research. Change in medicine and health occurs in a range of ways.
- Communicating with patients and the public requires communication skills separate to those required when communicating with other doctors. In oncology, it is especially important to be able to explain complex issues to patients with poor health literacy
- Continuous improvement and reflecting on broader issues

## Take-home points

- Remain broadly skilled, with a good understanding across medicine, and read broadly to stay informed about the world around you
- Don't be embarrassed to deliberately consider your life and plans. Doctors have incredibly high expectations of themselves but there is nothing wrong with taking time to decide what you want to do in your career and how you would like to live your life
- Find a mentor who knows you well and can offer advice
- Do not be afraid of rejection
- Ranjana's reading diet/routine consists of The New York Times, The Economist – if you want to be a writer, read widely and read what is considered to be good writing to reflect on your own style

## Related Podcasts

- [Creative careers in medicine](#)
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