

# Derbyshire General Practice Champions

## Dr Penelope Blackwell

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Derbyshire Dales Place Lead  
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Clinical lead for Derbyshire [Shared Care Pathology](#)



### Career journey:

I took a bit of a circuitous route into general practice. To say the least! Originally studying for a biochemistry degree, I then undertook Clinical Biochemistry and sat my MRCP at 24y. Part of my role as a hospital scientist was to undertake research and development, and ultimately a PhD in metabolic bone disease, my time spent between the East Midlands hospitals, Melbourne St Vincents hospital in Australia and lecturing overseas. I gained interests in audit, research, quality improvement as well as bone disease and endocrinology. My activities reawakened my desire to study medicine, which I began at the end of 1999 (writing up a PhD during 2000 and having a baby in the summer holidays between years 2 and 3!) Given my background, I always thought that I would end up in endocrine medicine, but quickly found out that I was a generalist. I started out on the A&E career ladder, but quickly found that I was unable to sustain the rota with a toddler and a new baby, so chose to move into one of the other generalist careers – general practice. I can honestly say that I've not looked back since.

### Best thing about your roles:

Being a partner allows me to lead a small team of people to be the best they can be to serve a wonderfully diverse community. And I get to work with and lead so many different people with different views and ideas and within a small community to effect change and support health and wellbeing of this rural town and surrounds. People matter to me, and whether I'm working with patients, with colleagues, with staff, outside or inside my organisation, my roles support this. My passion for biochemistry has never left me and I work with previous colleagues, now at Royal Derby on the Shared Care pathology project, to support medics in understanding requesting and interpretation of pathology results – something we don't get enough training in! My Place lead role is an expression of my role as a partner in a rural general practice – providing system leadership with the health and wellbeing professional community to improve people's lives in the Derbyshire Dales. Not a bad aspiration and one which always has surprising solutions and outcomes to difficult problems.

### Best piece of advice you received:

Try hard not to work full time only being a GP and seeing patients. It's an emotionally demanding and sometimes feels a risky and isolated role. You can do so much by creating a portfolio of roles - not only seeing patients 1-1, but by creating system-wide change, to create a work life that is varied, exciting and sustainable. And get a hobby – and give it priority.

### Best advice I could give:

Seek those out who support you and lift you up – professionally and at home. You will need them. You have an obligation to use your skills to make a huge difference to people: patients, colleagues, employees. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't – go with your gut and work to help change. Spend time working out who you are and what you stand for; what drives you to get up in the morning and to work late. And then work to these values, sticking to them professionally, and in your interactions with everyone and in your decision making.