



SABBATICAL LEAVE AND OPPORTUNITIES

Sabbatical leave is a unique and powerful provision available to the medical workforce. The opportunity has myriad potential benefits for intensivists as high stakes decision makers including:

- A change of environment
- The opportunity to develop a new skill
- An opportunity to contribute to the broader community
- Potential to travel - nationally or internationally
- The chance to develop new professional networks, relationships and friendships
- A shared experience with family
- The opportunity to pursue a project or area of interest in depth
- A chance to step away from high demands of work life and recharge

Two Perspectives of Sabbatical Experiences

Perspective 1 – Research Fellowship

I engaged in a research fellowship in the UK. Whilst being significantly different to my daily work, this allowed me to build some additional skills. Working with an international research team with a broad range of skills and interests was an opportunity to build my own communication and collaboration skills, both face to face and via teleconference. Studying a new subject such as epidemiology was a steep learning curve and therefore highly stimulating and interesting.

And then there was the environment itself. Running laps of Hyde Park in the mornings to clear my head, or simply marvelling at the unique London architecture or history seemed to bring a different creativity and adventure to my academic life.

Whilst for me it was an opportunity to build skills, recharge and think differently, for my colleagues sabbatical has ranged broadly.

Examples include:

- Helping to build a critical care program in a low-income environment.
- Studying a subspecialty in a remote location.
- Concluding a PhD.
- Returning to a home country to unite with professional colleagues on a shared project.
- Building an education program for the local unit.

Perspective 2 – Overseas Aid

When the opportunity for my sabbatical came up, I was pretty stressed and tired and felt a strong need to use the time to spend with my family and experience something totally different from the usual daily grind. I had always wanted to experience medicine in a developing country and see whether I could help and learn in a low resource environment. However, I also wanted some time to decompress, reflect and plan for the next phase of life.

The opportunity to work in Samoa in their ICU came to my attention and this seemed to fit the bill perfectly. I envisioned helping out during the day, but with plenty of quality time in a tropical island environment with my wife and 3 kids.

It was a fantastic experience!

Clinically, I was exposed to multiple new challenges and experiences. Away from my usual supportive tertiary academic ICU environment, I had to hone my clinical skills again and trust my clinical judgement. The variety of clinical problems was phenomenal and really stimulating and invigorating. I was very lucky to have such an exceptional team to work with and learnt plenty from them each day, while also feeling that I had my own knowledge and skills to offer.

There was some stress involved, and inevitable cultural and environmental differences to navigate. We had a high proportion of very sick children (I have no PICU training), and there were inevitable resource constraints which made the job difficult (ie. the CT scanner out of action for an extended period).

However, the overwhelming feeling I had by the end of my time was of intense satisfaction at having helped out in a resource poor environment, as well as growing as a clinician and making lifelong connections with Samoa ICU and the staff I worked with.

I was clear from the start that I was not there just to fill a spot in the roster and that I needed time to spend with my family as well. The kids plugged into a local school for 3 months and the experience for them to be fully immersed in another culture was a once in a lifetime opportunity for our family for which I feel very privileged. My kids have now stepped out of their sheltered 1st world life and learnt about and experienced a broader world view. We also managed to spend time sightseeing together, with plenty of snorkelling and family fun.

This 3 month period was such an enriching and diverse experience for us all. My personal view is that the sabbatical is an extremely valuable opportunity not to be missed.

Sabbatical provisions in New Zealand and Australia:

ASMS DHB MECA - New Zealand

For New Zealanders, this is the relevant clause (See reference below for full description):

36.5 Sabbatical

(a) After every six years of service, an employee may apply for sabbatical leave of three months, or other agreed period, on full pay, whether as a continuous period or a series of separate periods, to spend time at other clinical units or centres, universities or research institutes for the purposes of strengthening or acquiring clinical knowledge or skills or undertaking an approved course of study or research in matters relevant to their clinical practice.

CME funds may be used for the purposes of the sabbatical.

EBA - 2018 - Australia

In Australia, provisions for sabbatical are:

- **After 6 years continuous service**

Up to 26 weeks (or 2 periods of 13 weeks within 2 years)

Whilst the EBA states that sabbatical can be taken “...as soon as practicable having regard to the needs of the Health Service” “...the taking of such leave may be postponed to a mutually agreed date.” It is particularly important that the many hidden benefits of sabbatical are not underestimated by the employer, particularly in regard to workforce wellbeing and retention. It is difficult to estimate the lifespan of the modern intensivist, but career breakpoints such as sabbatical leave seem to be important.

Sabbatical leave is a powerful opportunity to develop both your career and yourself in many different ways. If you have an experience or learnings that you would like to share via the Welfare SIG, please email stephaniea@cicm.org.au.

References:

[Specialists Enterprise Agreement 2018](#)

<https://www.asms.org.nz/clause-36/>