

Dr Anoushka Thurlow

Aspiring Leaders Fellowship 2024-2025 - Coventry & Warwickshire

Taking part in the Aspiring Leaders Fellowship has been one of the most formative experiences of my professional journey to date. The fellowship has given me the opportunity to strengthen my understanding of leadership in primary care, develop new networks, and contribute meaningfully to system-level conversations. Over the year, I have combined structured leadership development with active involvement in projects. These experiences have broadened my perspective, enhanced my skills, and consolidated my ambition to pursue leadership roles alongside my clinical career.

Projects and Interests

Training Academy Development

One of the central projects of my fellowship has been the creation of a Training Academy through the Coventry and Warwickshire Training Hub. This project was developed in response to the pressing need to expand the general practice workforce and to increase both the number and diversity of roles. With demand in primary care continuing to grow, the academy aims to provide a structured programme of learning that will support GP trainees, medical students, advanced clinical practitioners, first contact practitioners, physician associates, nurses, and nursing associates.

An equally important strand of the work has been the focus on supporting and retaining educators, assessors, and supervisors within general practice. By delivering a range of training programmes, the academy will strengthen both the workforce pipeline and the quality of supervision and education offered within practices.

Developing this initiative has required close collaboration with key partners including Warwick Medical School, the GP School, and Coventry University. Ensuring alignment across stakeholders has been both rewarding and challenging. A significant part of my role has involved reviewing existing programmes to ensure our work complements rather than duplicates what is already being delivered. We have held multiple meetings and gathered extensive feedback to ensure content is relevant, adaptable, and tailored to diverse learning needs.

While the process has not been without its challenges, it has been highly rewarding. Seeing the enthusiasm of stakeholders and receiving positive feedback has reinforced the importance of this work. I feel proud to have contributed to the early development of a project that has the potential to make a real and lasting impact on workforce development in Coventry and Warwickshire.

GP Gateway Editorial Board

Alongside the Training Academy, I was also able to contribute to the GP Gateway Editorial Board. In this capacity, I reviewed and curated educational content, ensuring that resources were up to date, relevant, and aligned with the needs of GPs.

This role provided me with a different perspective on leadership – one that emphasised the importance of knowledge dissemination at scale. It was fascinating to see how educational content is created, reviewed, and implemented across a system, and to play a part in making resources as useful as possible for frontline clinicians.

This experience also broadened my appreciation of how communication tools can support clinical practice and system improvement. It highlighted the importance of clear, accessible information in supporting high-quality patient care and professional development.

Future Leaders Programme

A central element of the fellowship was completing the six-week Future Leaders Programme. This structured training covered leadership theory and practice, focusing on challenges unique to the NHS. Sessions explored personal leadership styles, managing change, building effective teams, and navigating the complexities of health and care systems.

The programme gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own leadership style, build confidence in my ability to lead, and practise applying new approaches in real time. Working alongside peers with similar aspirations created a supportive environment in which we could learn from one another, share experiences, and challenge ourselves.

This programme provided a strong foundation for the rest of the fellowship and equipped me with skills that I will continue to develop in future leadership roles.

Workforce Conversations

I particularly valued the opportunity to meet with the GP Workforce Lead to discuss the primary care workforce. This conversation provided valuable insight into the scale of workforce challenges across Coventry and Warwickshire and highlighted the innovative approaches being used to address them.

Understanding workforce dynamics at this level gave me a more strategic perspective on how leadership roles can influence both immediate team functioning and long-term sustainability. It also reinforced the importance of supporting recruitment, retention, and development if we are to ensure a thriving primary care system in the years ahead.

Networking and Peer Support

One of the most rewarding aspects of the fellowship has been the opportunity to connect with other Aspiring Leaders Fellows (ALFs). The monthly forums were particularly inspiring, providing an open and supportive space where we could share experiences, discuss challenges, and learn from one another.

These meetings fostered a sense of belonging within a wider leadership community. I felt encouraged by the collective commitment to improving primary care, and I am confident that the relationships and friendships developed will lead to future collaboration.

System-Level Forums

My involvement also extended into system-level conversations. I attended a Primary Care Collaborative meeting and participated in the PCN Clinical Director and Aspiring Clinical Director forum.

These forums offered me invaluable exposure to the realities of leadership at a system level. They highlighted the delicate balance between meeting local priorities and responding to national expectations. Listening to experienced clinical directors share their insights gave me a better understanding of the negotiation, resilience, and vision-setting required to lead effectively within the NHS.

Training Hub Board Presentation

Another highlight was the opportunity to present to the Training Hub Board. Preparing for and delivering a Training Academy presentation gave me the chance to reflect on my learning, articulate my perspective as an aspiring leader, and show how my fellowship experience aligned with the wider objectives of the Training Hub.

Although it was initially daunting, the positive feedback I received was hugely encouraging. It strengthened my confidence in contributing to senior-level discussions and reinforced the importance of communicating clearly and effectively as a leader.

Continuing Professional Development

As part of my Aspiring Leaders Fellowship, I have been afforded the flexibility to extend my learning beyond the ALF year, allowing me to focus on CPD, to explore areas that will complement my leadership journey. This opportunity will enable me to engage with a range of high-quality learning experiences, broadening my perspective on healthcare leadership.

I have completed a *Demystifying AI* online course and plan to attend an *Artificial AI in Healthcare* course with the University of Lancashire, to enhance my understanding of technology and innovation in patient care. I will also participate in *ShiftWorks*, a leadership simulation, to develop decision-making, resilience, and problem-solving in complex healthcare environments. The *Teacher the Teacher* programme will further strengthen my educational and mentorship skills, directly supporting my ongoing clinical and non-clinical commitments.

Personal Impact

This year has been one of real growth for me. I have developed greater confidence in my leadership abilities and a stronger sense of self-awareness. Alongside this, I have built new networks and established mentoring relationships that have provided invaluable guidance and encouragement. I have also adapted my working style to balance multiple roles, which has helped me become more flexible and resilient. In every project and meeting, I have felt respected and valued, which has reinforced my development as a leader.

The monthly forums with other fellows were a particular highlight, offering inspiration, learning, and peer support. These sessions not only broadened my perspective but also strengthened friendships and professional connections that I believe will endure.

Developing an understanding of NHS systems at both national and local level has been a steep but rewarding learning curve. I now feel better equipped to navigate the structures of the ICB and to appreciate the opportunities presented. This has consolidated my aspiration to hold roles that bring about positive change in services and systems.

Most importantly, the fellowship has had a profound impact on my career direction. It has opened new possibilities, inspired new ambitions, and given me the confidence to step into leadership roles alongside my clinical practice. I leave the programme with gratitude, enthusiasm, and a firm commitment to continue my leadership journey. I would wholeheartedly recommend the fellowship to others and will continue to champion and support the scheme in the future.