



University of
Lancashire



Doctors and Borders: Navigating an NHS Career as an IMG

Waled Salem

Doctoral Researcher, University of
Lancashire

Event:

The Annual Scientific Day of the Egyptian
Medical Society UK

Session:

Professionalism and Career Development

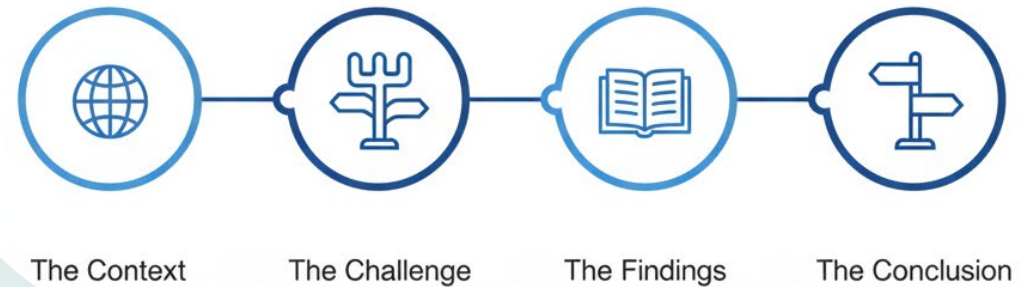
From Personal Reflection to Systemic Patterns

- Complementing **reflective practice** by identifying the **systemic patterns** that shape career journeys.
- My work is inspired by the dedication and expertise of professionals like yourselves, a **cornerstone of the NHS**.
- As a non-medic, I bring a '**systems-thinking**' lens to analyse the 'career scripts' that guide doctors' careers.



Our Journey Today

1. **Why does this topic matter** now more than ever?
2. **What is the core structural hurdle** for many IMGs?
3. **What are the 'unwritten playbooks'** for navigating an NHS career?
4. What does this mean **for the path forward?**



A Pillar of the NHS

- The **UK has fewer doctors** per capita than the **European average**.
- **34.5%** of all licensed doctors in the UK are International Medical Graduates (**IMGs**).
- NHS England's Long-Term Workforce Plan (**LTWP**) confirms a continued reliance on IMGs for at least the **next decade**.



More than 1 in 3 UK doctors are IMGs

The 'Official' Path vs. The 'Lived' Reality for Many IMGs

The traditional training programme leading to a **Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT)**.

Requires securing a highly competitive **National Training Number (NTN)**.

Often channelled into non-training roles, such as Specialty and Associate Specialist (**SAS**) doctors.

Frequently leads to the more difficult **CESR pathway** to become a consultant.

Goal



Start

Goal



Start

The Questions Driving the Research

1. What are the **common career journeys** for IMGs?
2. What specific **barriers and facilitators** impact Egyptian doctors' careers?
3. How do they **actively manage and navigate** the system to build successful careers?



A Rigorous & Ethical Approach

- **Method:** The insights are drawn from confidential, in-depth, **semi-structured interviews**.
- **Participants:** A diverse group of doctors were selected—varying by specialty, role, and years of experience—to capture **a wide range of perspectives**.
- **Ethical Approval:** The study has full ethical approval from the University of Lancashire (Reference: **BAHSS2 01310**).
- **Trustworthiness:** To ensure findings are authentic, preliminary results were shared with participants for feedback on their accuracy (**'Member Checks'**).

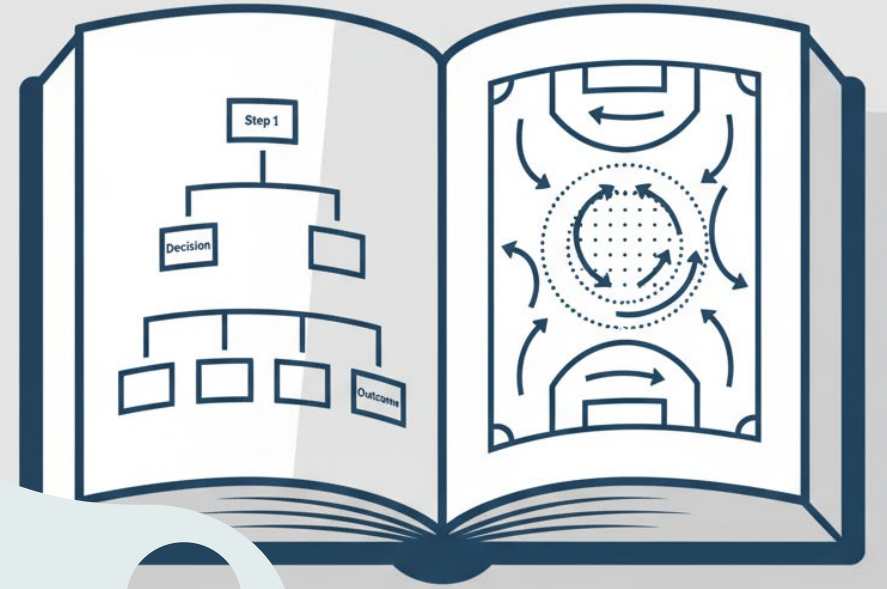


Emerging Patterns: The 'Unwritten Playbooks'

From these conversations, distinct patterns of action began to emerge, which my research identifies as '**Career Scripts**'.

A Career Script is defined as the:

"...observable, recurrent activities and patterns of interaction characteristic of a particular setting."

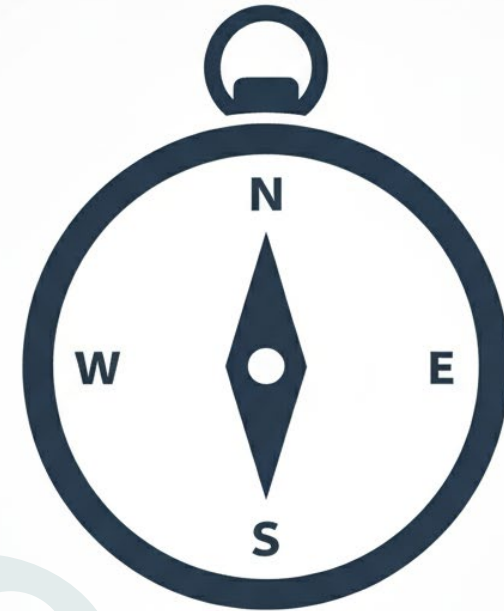


Script 1: The Strategic Navigator

- This script is defined by a **proactive, analytical, and goal-oriented** approach to mastering the NHS as a complex system.
- Strategic Navigators do not wait for opportunities; they **systematically engineer them**.
- **Key Behaviours:**
 - Actively seeking 'system knowledge' and mentorship.
 - Making calculated '**stepping-stone**' career choices.
 - Methodically building a portfolio to meet progression criteria.

In the words of one doctor:

"If you didn't put your criteria, someone will put it for you."



Script 2: The Community Scaffolding

- This script is defined by creating and cultivating **informal, peer-based communities** as the central strategy for navigation and survival.
- The peer network acts as a **primary, parallel support structure**, providing the practical and emotional resources the formal institution often fails to offer.
- **Key Behaviours:**
 - Leveraging informal networks (e.g., social media) for initial survival.
 - Decoding the system's "unwritten rules" for career progression.
 - Evolving from receiving support to **'paying it forward'** and becoming a community builder.

In the words of one doctor:

The support group "took me out of depression at some point... [it] saved me at my darkest times."





Script 3: The Pragmatic Survivor

- This script is characterised by **resilience, adaptation, and forging an individualised path** that prioritises personal well-being over a conventional trajectory.
- It is often triggered by significant systemic obstacles or a misalignment between personal values and the demands of the '**classic pathway**'.
- **Key Behaviours:**
 - Demonstrating **sheer persistence** to endure setbacks.
 - Making a **conscious 'pivot'** to a different role or speciality that offers a better work-life balance.

In the words of one doctor:

"*□□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□*"

Loosely translated: "No one who is anxious can ever be happy."

Thinking About the Scripts: Key Considerations

- **Adopted Strategies, Not Fixed Personalities:** These scripts are not personality types. An individual can shift from one strategy to another as their circumstances or priorities change.
- **A Spectrum of Behaviours:** There are no hard dividing lines. In practice, many doctors use a hybrid of these strategies rather than belonging to a single, rigid category.
- **Emergent, Not Exhaustive Findings:** These are the three dominant scripts emerging from the research so far. As data collection continues, other patterns may well emerge.



A Dialogue: Your Reflections & The Path Forward

A Question for You:

"Does this 'career script' resonate with your observations or experiences within the NHS?"

The Path Forward:

- To truly support IMG careers, the NHS must move beyond **"homogenised, one-size-fits-all" interventions.**
- The future lies in developing **tailored mentorship, culturally sensitive career support, and transparent credential pathways.**



Thank You

Waled Salem

Doctoral Researcher

University of Lancashire

WSalem@Lancashire.ac.uk

