

Medical marvel

Dawn Soo's switch from physician to health care management took patience, writes **John Brennan**

GAME-CHANGERS

The academic choices an 18-year-old student makes will obviously have an influence on their career. But when that student opts to study medicine, their future looks pretty well set.

However, having trained and worked as a physician for several years, Dawn Soo made a very successful move into the business side of health care, building on her people skills and medical know-how.

After completing an MBA at business school INSEAD in 2012, Soo co-founded DocDoc, a website that enables users to find doctors and book appointments online.

Then, in 2014, the Singaporean joined ConnexionsAsia (CXA), a tech company offering HR departments a platform for managing health, benefits and insurance. Soo is now the company's chief wellness officer and head of Hong Kong operations.

"At 18, I didn't really have a clue what I wanted to do," she explains. "I liked the sciences and my parents, being Asian, had a big part to play in my decision [to study medicine]."

"But I did start enjoying medical school and maybe more so when I started with clinical rotations and got to meet and interact with patients."

On graduation, Soo spent three-and-a-half years working in internal medicine at the National University, Singapore's teaching hospital. "I'd found I really liked managing patients and I thought family medicine might be a nice thing to do – I did enjoy my year doing it. But I wanted to find out what else I could do beyond clinical medicine."

After Soo's MBA, she thought she would join a pharmaceutical company, but a chance meeting with her partners-to-be led to the setting up of DocDoc. For the first six months, the role involved knocking on doors at private hospitals, putting her on the other side of the fence.

"You are just a sales person who's made to wait, sometimes for hours, before the doctor invites you in and gives you five minutes. It was so hard and very humbling." Now, though, she thinks this was a necessary skin-thickening process.

Things started getting a little easier after her first year with DocDoc, but within another 12 months she was again thinking of exploring other career options. When the CEO of CXA Rosaline Koo found out she was considering leaving DocDoc, she invited Soo to test drive a position in the company to see if it would appeal to her.

Her first year with the company was largely spent learning about the insurance industry and shadowing sales people. "This is primarily a business-to-business company, which was really different to what I was used to."

The business already has 500 corporate clients in Singapore that use the platform, which helps them decide health budgets and lets employees choose whether they, for example, assign less of their package to cover GP visits and use the money saved to pay for their gym membership.



Photo: Sky Lip

Starting up in a new country is like having your own start-up, except you know there's help

DAWN SOO, HONG KONG HEAD, CONNEXIONSASIA

CXA's Hong Kong operation goes live in January, but support from the company's established infrastructure makes it less daunting for Soo.

"We had to hire a team and we do have numbers to hit. What's quite nice, though, is that starting up in a new country is a bit like having your own start-up, except you know there's always help coming from headquarters if you absolutely need it."

Management experience has taught Soo that finding the right person is more important than finding the right skill set. "The fit is more important than the skills as they can be taught," she says.

And she thinks her days as a practising physician helped to shape her more measured perspective on life. She recalls the time a 17-year-old was admitted to her hospital after fainting – only for staff to discover the teenager had an untreatable tumour.

"We had to speak to the parents about letting him go, but they just weren't ready. I re-

member the night he passed away. I was on night duty and you could hear the parents' cries from a block away.

"I think when every young medical student qualifies, you think you've got all this knowledge and you can do so much. But the more patients you see, the more you start to realise that, actually, all you have to offer sometimes is comfort."

Today Soo is more concerned with prevention rather than cure and this seems to chime with her personal philosophy.

"Actually, if you are pretty healthy and your body allows you to do what you want to do, that's a huge blessing. So then, without trivialising stuff, nothing else is that big a deal and most things can be sorted out."



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CAREER GUIDE

Keeping it real

As a recruitment and communications strategist, part of my role is to enable candidates to come across as authentic and professional in interviews.

We tend to switch off if we feel there is something insincere and inconsistent about the person we're speaking to. It can be a sudden change in the tone of voice, words that sound rehearsed, or involuntarily crossing arms when answering certain questions.

Our instincts pick up these cues and we put up our guard. That is why authenticity is so powerful – it speaks to the heart of people interviewing you.

Being authentic starts with being honest with yourself. Acknowledge your strengths and think of stories that illustrate them. When asked about your weaknesses and failures, be honest and talk about how you are working on them. Don't try to use the question as a way to soft-sell your strengths.

I would also encourage you to evaluate your career to find out who you are. What motivates you? What gives you satisfaction? What achievements are you most proud of? What are your deepest fears, and what are your aspirations? This will help you make sense of your career choices and answer relevant questions with ease and confidence.

But there is a fine line between familiarity and authenticity. Authenticity is only relevant in the context of the interview. Personal stories substantiate

Being authentic starts with being honest with you



a point you are trying to make beyond that, they are inappropriate. Your qualifications and experience are all relevant in an interview, but facts to life, so go for it and an open mind.

May Chan is the recruitment manager at FocusScore Recruitment.

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Mark Snowden

Northern Trust

Snowdon has been appointed head of Trust's capital markets client service. He will be responsible for leading the team of service representatives and levels of expertise for its institution base throughout the region. Prior to Snowdon was a senior sales and relationship manager in Northern Trust's London office.



Billy Wong

Mercer

Mercer has announced the appointment of Billy Wong as its new MD and Hong Kong business leader responsible for driving growth across Hong Kong operations, focusing on driving performance and employee engagement. Wong is a senior consultant at Mercer from Sun Life Asia, which is a China business. Previously, he was a senior consultant and VP for institutional clients at Mercer.



Matthew Bristow

Alexander Mann Solutions

Bristow has been made Alexander Mann Solutions' head of consulting services for Asia. He is enabling clients attract, retain and develop talent for their businesses. He has 15 years' experience in leading consulting teams with client China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the UK and the US. He was educated in the field of sport psychology.

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