Judith Smith (1987-1989 & 1995-2009)

In 1986, as a Modern Languages undergraduate at the University of Birmingham interested in a career in public management, the University Careers Service suggested that I go over to Edgbaston Park Road to HSMC to find out about the NHS Management Training Scheme. This I did, and **Peter Spurgeon** agreed to see me for a chat there and then, and this was instrumental in me applying for, and being accepted onto the GMTS programme for 1987 entry.

As a national management trainee, I was based at HSMC for my education programme, with Peter Spurgeon as my tutor. I have fond memories of residential programmes at Park House, including excellent catering provided by the formidable Miss Ryder and her team, lectures by **Mike Drummond**, **John Yates**, Brian Edwards, Rosemary Stewart, and Penny Mullen (to whom I owe huge gratitude for teaching me statistical analysis and how to use my scientific calculator), and unfailing and sardonic support from Michael the caretaker who manned the HSMC bar in the evenings, and also held the video camera when we were practising presentation and negotiation skills in teaching sessions.

After a number of years working in NHS management in hospitals in the Midlands, I became curious in the mid-1990s about purchasing and GP fundholding, and felt an itch to get back to academic work. Conversations with Peter Spurgeon, **John Clark** (my MTS mentor in Solihull), Chris Ham and others led me to apply for a post at HSMC. Although I was unproven in academic terms, I am eternally grateful to Chris Ham for taking a punt on me and appointing me initially as a research associate in 1995, and then as a permanent Fellow in 1996, and Senior Lecturer in 2001.

The late 1990s were a great time to be working at HSMC. We built a wide programme of research, teaching and consultancy within which I focused on health commissioning, primary care, international health policy, and management development. From a personal perspective, a three-year DH-funded national evaluation of primary care groups and trusts, numerous action research studies of locality commissioning, a new MSc in Primary Health Care Policy and Management, and winning the contract in 2003 to continue to provide the education programme for NHS management trainees were particular highlights.

My work at HSMC enabled me to build a career and profile in health services teaching and research whilst remaining rooted in health care management. I was also able to study for a PhD in health services management (examining the experience of women chief executives). **Edward Peck** gave me the wonderful opportunity of a one-year sabbatical period in New Zealand in 2007 to complete my PhD, a time that was so special for me and my family that we negotiated to stay for a second year. Whilst in New Zealand, I secured a new post as Head of Policy at the Nuffield Trust in London with effect from February 2009, moving to work with Jennifer Dixon who was building a new team to carry out health research and policy analysis.

HSMC has been central to my 25-year management and research career, and my connections continue even though I now work in London. I continue to have a visiting post at HSMC, and as I live in South Birmingham, I enjoy being able to teach occasional sessions at HSMC, and undertake joint research studies with university colleagues. HSMC is a very important resource and retreat for health and social care managers, a place to think, reflect and re-energise. Long may it continue its excellent work, and here's to the next 40 years!

© University of Birmingham 2014