

# Member Feature

## My Practice

We're committed to helping advance our members in their private practices, whether they are established or just starting out. We aim to celebrate the achievements of members by highlighting their work in The NSW Doctor.



Dr Akalya Mahendran, Founder of Sydney Gastroenterology Collective

Each edition features select members in private practice, offering a platform to showcase their unique approaches, learnings and success stories.

By sharing their stories, challenges, and triumphs we aim to encourage knowledge-sharing while also providing members with well-deserved recognition for their contributions to the profession.

In this edition we highlight Dr Akalya Mahendran, Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist, and valued AMA (NSW) Councillor and member.

Dr Mahendran Founded the Sydney Gastroenterology Collective

in Sydney's Inner West in June 2023. The Collective is a collegial modern speciality service which prides itself on high quality evidence based care, accessibility and kindness. Dr Mahendran is passionate about holistic patient focused care.

### What was your vision for starting a private practice?

I wanted to start a practice based around my personality and how I deliver healthcare. I thrive most on the understanding that every patient is an individual, whether it's the first time or the 300th time you've addressed a similar complaint. I also wanted to create a flexible practice model; I'm a young mum so I wanted to be mobile and accessible, and I wanted to expand my practice to encourage other people with young families to join. There are fewer women, particularly young women in medicine who are starting their own business so that heavily influenced my ideas.

### What was the biggest challenge?

Marketing has been the single most challenging area, because you have to go out there, introduce yourself, sell yourself and tell colleagues what you're about. You've got to convince colleagues that you've been trained well, you know what you're doing, and they should trust their patients to your care. You have to approach other doctors, particularly GPs, who are already referring to other gastroenterologists. So, the question becomes why you and why now. That was a steep learning curve and I think my confidence in that area has increased over the last 12 months.

### What has been rewarding about the process?

I think patient feedback is the number one positive that keeps you going, it is always a surprise when it comes but it makes it all worth it. You are trying to address the patients and their concerns - if you succeed, then that's the ultimate goal.



Strathfield Private Hospital, Sydney, SCG Rooms. Photo credit: Brendan Reid

## MY PRACTICE

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### What would you say to a doctor deciding whether to start their own practice?

One of the most challenging and rewarding parts of it is learning the business of medicine, which we are not taught well, or if at all, in the public sector. The best advice I received, and what I would give others is, it's worthwhile working at many practices to understand the different models that people work in. Get as much exposure as you can and know that succeeding doesn't come quickly or immediately. It has been quite challenging, especially being early in my career, but it is

definitely doable. I'm a paperless practice which I think is quite appropriate for 2024, and I've found the business of medicine very fascinating and a skillset that I've really enjoyed learning about.

### Has private practice made life easier for you as a working parent?

I think there is a flexibility in private practice in general, you can decide to have lists that finish late, or you have the ability to contact patients and send emails after hours when the baby is asleep. That's not unique to private practice but what I've found is, because I have a cloud based medical software, I can do my work at any time day or night, while also providing adequate patient care. 9-5 is great and predictable however life is not predictable so that's where I found that having my own practice is good for my life and suits the different challenges with having a child.

### What is one simple thing that you have learnt since owning your practice?

It's that you will make mistakes and don't be afraid of that. Don't be afraid of saying sorry. Starting up your practice and getting to that five year goal is a slow process. You're not always taking 2 steps forward; you are continuously making mistakes and learning. That can be quite daunting because you are doing that on your own, however it is definitely worth pushing through because it's just part of the learning process.

It is a balance of ensuring you're maintaining a professional specialist practice and ensuring patients are comfortable and secure in your care. I am also open with my patients about the fact that I am a young mum and that gives me the ability to relate to them in a positive way. **dr.**

**Do you** want to start your own practice?

**Do you** know how to read your specialist contract?

**Do you** know how to navigate billing?



AMA (NSW) is launching the **Emerging Specialist Network**.

The Emerging Specialist Network will allow specialists to meet new colleagues and share information and ideas about how to set up a private practice.

Build your referral network and connect with established members who will share their insights into building a practice.

Hear and benefit from our in-house experts and exclusive commercial partners who will help equip members with the knowledge

and tools to establish themselves in private practice - from the basics of business, medicare and billing solutions to indemnity, cyber and liability insurance.

The Emerging Specialist Network will be your one stop shop as you transition into this exciting new phase of your career.



To express your interest in the network, please email [events@amansw.com.au](mailto:events@amansw.com.au)



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