We caught up with Gillian 90 minutes south of Sydney in a café opposite Wollongong Hospital, one of the two locations where she splits her time as a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist.

Was it always your ambition to work in psychiatry?
I had not seriously considered it as a career path until I did my Psychiatry rotation as a Resident Medical Officer. The supervisors were truly inspiring and extremely supportive, and my interest developed from there. On subsequent rotations I became more and more fascinated with the way the brain works.

How was the training program structured?
After completing three years of “basic training”, trainees intending to specialise in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, will spend the remaining two years (known as “advanced training”) gaining a range of experiences in this subspecialty. I found the advanced training to be well structured and comprehensive, and the culture extremely collegial.

What do you most enjoy about your work now?
I love working in multi-disciplinary teams where nurses, psychologists, social workers, dieticians and others all bring different skills to a shared goal of comprehensive care. Early intervention in young people with mental health issues can make a huge difference, restoring hope, function and even helping to keep families together. It can be challenging and at times confronting, but it’s always varied and often rewarding.

What appeals to you about living in the Illawarra area?
I was initially motivated to move to this region by my desire to live in a semi-rural setting. This is an incredibly beautiful part of the world, located between the escarpment and the sea. We have amazing beaches, a stunning escarpment backdrop and beautiful rainforests. Professionally, I really enjoy working in a regional setting where I am continually exposed to a full range of clinical experiences.

How are you able to balance work and family life?
Surprisingly well. The Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health District has been very family friendly, and have been continually supportive in allowing me to take time off during training and to work part time to meet my family responsibilities.

What does the future hold for you?
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry is a very exciting specialty. There are significant scientific advances being made at present, which have improved our understanding of pathological processes, as well as our ability to successfully manage these. This time of rapid change also presents enthusiastic clinicians with an opportunity to participate in research. Ultimately, my professional goal is to balance clinical work with my research interests and, in turn, to balance these with my personal and family life.

Dr Gillian Sanzone,
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