



July 2018

### About me

My name is Zafrina Poonja, and I am a PGY-4 Emergency Medicine resident at the University of Alberta. I grew up in Edmonton and completed my medical degree at the University of Saskatchewan.

### Why I chose Emergency Medicine

I feel at home here! The emergency department is always changing. No two days are the same, and it will always challenge you in some way. Throughout medical school, I enjoyed different aspects of all my clinical rotations. Emergency medicine allows me to dive into every specialty while caring for the critically ill. What I love most are the people, from the people I work with to the patients I meet. It's a place that will always humble you. I can learn something from everyone.

## Clinical Life

### What kinds of rotations are required in your program?

We are required to complete medicine-based, surgical-based, and critical-care rotations.

In the first two years of residency, we rotate through internal medicine, cardiology, anesthesia, general surgery, neurosurgery, plastic surgery, and emergency medicine. Third year is focused on critical-care rotations, including adult ICU, pediatric ICU, and emergency specific rotations like EMS, helicopter EMS, and admin rotations.

Fourth year is focused on our area of interest, and I'm pursuing ultrasound and physician wellness. Fifth year is mainly emergency medicine and preparing for the Royal College exam.

### Which of your personality characteristics have been particularly helpful in your field?

I think two of my personality traits have been most helpful:

1. A sense of humour. The emergency department can be challenging, so a sense of humor helps me get through the long shifts. Being able to keep things light with colleagues and sharing a laugh with a patient is something I love about my work.
2. Adaptability. At times when patients are challenging or there are acute changes, I have found that being able to "go with the flow" and adapt to different situations has helped me remain calm and focused.



*The emergency department is always changing. No two days are the same, and it will always challenge you in some way.*

### What does a typical day of clinical duties involve?

Emergency medicine involves shift work, so no two weeks are the same. Most of our call and off-service rotations are completed in the first three years of residency. In our fourth year, we can explore and focus on a particular area of interest. There are so many options available, from resuscitation to medical education.

# Emergency Medicine Resident Profile — Zafrina Poonja

Here's what a typical week looks like:

Emergency Medicine – Weekly Schedule at a Glance								
	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
06:00							Shift	
07:00								
08:00			Teaching Junior Residents					
09:00		Organize my schedule for the week GYM	Academic Day	Ed Shift			Post-shift nap	
10:00						GYM		
11:00		GYM			Shift			
12:00								
13:00	Spend time with family/ friends	Get some work done						Work on research
14:00						GYM		
15:00								
16:00								
17:00			Hang out with co-residents post academic day					
18:00				Journal Club	Shift			
19:00								
20:00						Pre-shift nap		
21:00								
22:00								
23:00								
00:00						Shift		

## What are the best aspects of your residency?

My co-residents and the people I work with. Our program has a strong sense of community and residency would be impossible without my co-residents. They are always there to provide support when I need it.

## What are the most challenging aspects of your specialty/subspecialty?

As we know, burnout is common in emergency medicine. Shiftwork can be challenging, not to mention overcrowding and difficult interactions. I think the key is recognizing burnout early and developing healthy habits to counteract it when symptoms first appear.

## Can you describe the transition from clerkship into residency?

The thought of moving from junior to senior was nerve-wracking, but the transition just seemed to happen. You don't always believe it, but the program prepares you more than you realize. While you do have more responsibilities as a senior, I have never felt unprepared, and our staff is always there to support us. It was nice to have more ownership and responsibility over patients and the flow of shifts.

## Will you be pursuing further training or looking for employment? What resources are available to you for future planning?

While there are many fellowships that one can pursue after emergency medicine, I will be looking for employment. Our program directors have been very supportive in providing us with guidance around career management and future planning. In the second part of our fifth year, we usually manage the shift on our own, only consulting staff when needed. This provides a helpful period of transition to practice.



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## Non-Clinical Life

### What are your academic interests (e.g. leadership activities, research)?

My academic interests are in point-of-care ultrasound, particularly resuscitative ultrasound, and physician wellness. I have taken further training in ultrasound during my fourth year, focusing on cardiac and lung ultrasound, with the hope of taking on a role in ultrasound education. I've also had the opportunity to collaborate with many wellness champions on research and program design. During residency, I created a wellness program for residents that focuses on mindfulness and mental resiliency.

### What is your work-life balance like, and how do you achieve this?

Maintaining a work-life balance is essential to staying healthy through residency. Family and friends are my biggest supports. I make it a priority to spend time with them, especially when I feel “the burnout” coming on. Just like any other important meeting, scheduling regular time for physical activity guarantees that I make it to the gym. Going to the gym helps me manage my stress and gives me a better sleep. When I get the opportunity, I love to travel! A preceptor once told me, “you should be planning your next trip the moment you de-plane from the last one.” Solid advice, so you'll always have something to look forward too!

You can find Zafrina on Twitter @zafrinapoonja.

*Disclaimer: These specialty profiles illustrate some aspects of the lives of individual residents, and convey their personal perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and rewards of their chosen fields. These views may not be shared by all residents, as there is tremendous diversity in lifestyle, experience, and interest among the residents in each specialty.*