

'Glenny Alumni Program' Spotlight – Dr Joshua Haron Abasszade

Plenty of pathways to pursue not only a profession, but also your passion!

Joshua Abasszade was a student at Glen Waverley Secondary College from 2005 until he graduated his VCE with flying colours in 2010. When reflecting on his time at the college Josh fondly remembers epic experiments in the Sci Tech laboratories, classic soccer matches on the oval with the Year 12 boys every lunch time, tucking into crispy hot chips smothered in tomato sauce from the senior canteen, in addition to the camaraderie shared between Glenny students who competed together at SSV sports competitions and 'House' athletics carnivals. His favourite subjects included Chemistry and English, but Josh was particularly keen on Legal Studies with Ms Michelle Lock and Psychology with Ms Melissa Perera, both of whom (in addition to his parents) Josh credits for inspiring him to follow his passions in life. Their encouragement and care for all students in their classes also demonstrated to Josh how important teachers are in both the learning and personal development of their students. These '*Locky*' life lessons and memorable '*MPE*' moments certainly lingered in the limbic lobe and left a lasting legacy that would eventually lead Josh toward the learning he loves and the life he lives today.



During his final year of VCE Josh thought that he might like to sink his teeth into a Dentistry degree at university but was left devastated when he discovered too late that Units 3&4 Biology were a pre-requisite for this course. This change in entry requirements for dentistry had only occurred at the start of that same year, but Josh had somehow missed this significant tertiary admissions update. By the time he discovered this oversight he was unable to change VCE subjects, which was particularly hard to swallow as his preferred university later confirmed that he would have been accepted into the course if he had completed VCE Biology that year. Although Josh had his heart and mind set on becoming a dentist, he was open to exploring pathways associated with a potential career in pharmacy. Josh sat the UMAT (*Undergraduate Medical Admission Test*) in the hope of being accepted into a dentistry course, but he only achieved a score that enabled him to enrol in a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree which he commenced at Monash University in 2011. During his undergraduate studies Josh became increasingly interested in medicine, realising how a background in pharmacy would greatly benefit a doctor. So, he re-sat the UMAT again the following year, in the hope of levelling up into medicine, but was again unsuccessful. These setbacks only motivated Josh to work harder in the pursuit of his goals, so he decided to continue on with and complete his Pharmacy degree. He found this course to be both interesting and enjoyable, but more importantly he felt it would also make him a much better doctor in the future.

Josh went on to complete his Bachelor of Pharmacy degree at Monash University and was awarded Honours in 2014. During this time, Josh also mentored fellow pharmacy students, was captain of his local soccer club team, achieved a Black Belt 1st Dan in Taekwondo, tutored VCE Chemistry students,

volunteered at the 'Oakleigh Centre' for intellectually disabled citizens, whilst also working at Chemist Warehouse to support his tertiary studies. Although it appeared to many that Josh would likely pursue a professional career as a pharmacist, he knew deep down that his real passion was still medicine. Josh decided to sit the GAMSAT (*Graduate Medical School Admissions Test*) but was unsuccessful in securing a score that would lead to an offer of a position in a graduate medical course. Early on the following year, Josh re-sat the GAMSAT and secured interviews for both medicine and dentistry, but unfortunately, he was only accepted into dentistry at the University of Sydney. Feeling gutted, with what he believed were limited options moving forward, Josh reluctantly accepted the dentistry offer through clenched teeth as this was not the course he truly wanted to enrol in. However, he did so knowing that he would once again attempt to get into medicine, even if it was after completing a degree in dentistry.

Though Josh still harboured dreams of becoming a doctor, his family and friends suggested that his hopes of attending medical school that year stood as much chance as a cinder in snow. In spite of this, Josh had a fire in his belly and a dogged determination to not let his dreams be extinguished, so he got on the phone and called university after university regarding places in their medical courses. Initially he was informed that there were no spots available, same old story, but he was relentless in his pursuit of not only his future profession but also his true calling and passion. Akin to a school bell Josh kept on ringing universities across the country, at regular intervals for months on end, until his luck finally changed, when he was offered a full fee paying position in the postgraduate Doctor of Medicine course at the University of Notre Dame Fremantle in Western Australia, after another student had declined their offer of enrolment. Fables often espouse that fortune favours the brave, with Josh being no exception. After flying over to Fremantle to start his M.D. course, Josh was struck by luck yet again, receiving a call from the university to confirm that he would be offered an upgrade to a funded 'Commonwealth Supported Place' for his post-graduate course just one day before the census date. On hearing the news of another student withdrawing from their course, freeing up this 'CSP' opportunity, Josh's jaw hit the floor. Sometimes things are just meant to be he mused, especially for those in the right place at the right time at the start of their M.D.

Josh worked tirelessly throughout his medical degree and his endeavours were rewarded with multiple 'Letters of Commendation' from the Dean of the University of Notre Dame, including his final Dean's Commendation for being in the top third of medical graduates in 2018. Whilst completing his M.D. Josh volunteered at Cahoots Kids Camps and at the Migrant Resource Centre supporting refugees. He was also an integral member of the University of Notre Dame Mentoring Program and was the captain/coach of the 'UNDF' soccer team for three straight seasons, leading them to their maiden championship victory in 2017. Josh then made the decision to move back home to Victoria and begin his internship. Many people close to Josh were again not confident in this plan, as hospitals in the 'education state' responsible for training doctors are well known for providing first and second preferences to Melburnian medics in the making. This did not dissuade Josh, who again put the word out on the bush telegraph far and wide across Melbourne's health sector for what seemed like an eternity. Much like a Freo 'FIFO' worker from the West, Josh took flight on many an occasion to be interviewed for internships in Victoria, until he succeeded in securing a second round offer with Northern Health in 2019. Following his first year learning and working at Northern Health, Josh was able to secure a position in the physician training program at Monash Health to finally be closer to his family after five long years. Even though he only needed to work solely within the Monash Health system, Josh was so appreciative of the initial internship opportunity afforded to him by Northern Health that he still works casually with them as a locum doctor when he is able to, something he aims to continue doing throughout his career.

Linking his passions for pharmaceutical science and medicine, Josh is extremely passionate about public health and currently aiming to specialise in gastroenterology and hepatology to support people experiencing medical issues with their digestive and/or hepatic systems. Josh has now completed his basic

physician training and has commenced working as an unaccredited hepatology and IBD fellow (6 months each) in 2023, within the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Department at Monash Health. He has recently been accepted into the Gastroenterology advanced training specialty program commencing in 2024. Josh is also a Pharmacy Sessional Teaching Associate and OSCE Examiner for Monash University, where he has the opportunity to combine his love of mentoring, teaching, pharmacy and medicine. Additionally, Josh continues to mentor medical interns at Monash Health, as well as being a Monash University 'MMI Interviewer' for Medicine Admissions. He has also collaborated with medical researchers, undertaken and presented gastroenterology related audits, assisted in the preparation of posters for both national and international conferences, whilst also publishing a plethora of scientific papers in medical and pharmacology journals.

Over the journey Josh has developed an immense appreciation for medicine and pharmacy as he enjoys the complex nature of cases, including the challenge of diagnosing and treating various medical conditions. He looks forward to continually learning more about his profession, delving further into different fields of medical research, whilst always providing his patients with holistic and personalised care. When he's not working in hospitals, Josh loves to be involved in sporting activities such as soccer and table tennis, barracks for Collingwood, watches and keenly supports his beloved Melbourne Victory and Manchester United football teams, whilst also regularly attending the gym to keep fit and healthy. He also enjoys travelling and spending time with his wife, family and close friends.

When asked how he would like to sign off on his 'Glenny Alumni Program' Spotlight, Josh wished to pass on the following message to all members of our GWSC Community, particularly the current cohort of students – *"Success requires years of hard work and dedication, it doesn't happen overnight. In saying that, there is always an element of luck involved which we cannot control. What we can control however, is putting ourselves into that position to get lucky."*

Glen Waverley Secondary College are very proud to formally induct Dr Joshua Haron Abasszade into our 'Glenny Alumni Program'. Our college is very fortunate to have such a generous, hard-working and inspiring person as the inaugural member of our 'GAP', who is willing to give back to our college community as he does so on a daily basis in his profession. We look forward to welcoming Josh back to GWSC in the near future to share his story and message with more students and staff, in the hope of assisting and encouraging them to realise that there are plenty of pathways in life to pursue not only a profession, but more importantly your passion!

