

Doctoring your pathway to medicine



Dash Newington started an Academy of Sport scholarship in track and field. Now, she's studying to be a doctor. *Smart Start* looks at the many things that happened in between.

Dash grew up in Canberra, and reckons athletics was her driving force at school. In fact, triple jump was pretty much all she cared about. So when she suffered a career-ending injury, it wasn't exactly 'good times'.

After knuckling down and finishing Year 12, she headed up to sunny Queensland for the lifestyle and the weather. Dash was working for McDonald's as a manager. But Dash was doing more than flipping burgers. She was also telling other people how to flip burgers. No, seriously, she was doing heaps.

Dash used the flexibility and support at Maccas to add some serious content to her CV. She was involved with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Then she added value to her management experience with a diploma of business in frontline management via distance education.

Dash reckons the self-paced, distance education route was a great fit for her. So good that she also completed a diploma of business administration and a diploma in counselling and communication.

"Distance education taught me those skills of motivation and organisation, but wasn't stressful because I could slow the down the pace of my workload if I needed to," says Dash, now 24.

Then Dash became ill, and all the contact with doctors made her think about another pathway.

"I came to realise how much of a difference that a good, compassionate doctor can make to a patient"

She didn't have the Year 12 marks to get into the undergraduate medicine program (where you can study medicine straight from school), so she looked at graduate entry (where you start medicine after getting a bachelor degree in something else).

Of course, to do this, she needed a bachelor degree.

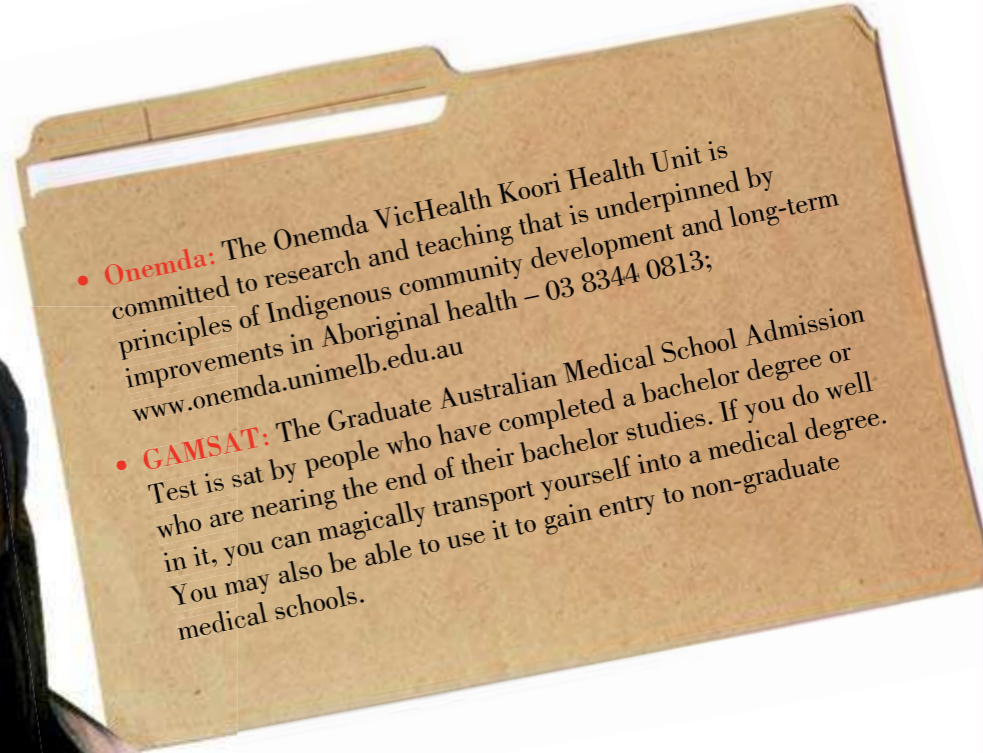
Using distance education stepping stones, she did an advanced diploma in applied social science and then articulated to a degree – again by distance – in applied social science through the Australian College of Applied Psychology.

She could have even added to her business studies and finished a business degree at university because, as she says, "My previous study opened up many options."

Somewhere along the way, Dash also managed to fit in a diploma of training assessment systems, which fitted nicely into her self-designed program of business-related education.

But the prospect of medicine as a career was continuing to excite her. She sat GAMSAT (see the breakout box), and then, instead of sitting on her hands and waiting for the result, she explored her Indigenous ancestry and took the diploma of Aboriginal studies at TAFE NSW's Open Training and Education Network (OTEN).

Dash was accepted into the University of Sydney Medical School. And, after all that, she is very pleased she didn't take the direct route to university.



• **Onemda:** The Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit is committed to research and teaching that is underpinned by principles of Indigenous health that is underpinned by improvements in Aboriginal health – 03 8344 0813; www.onemda.unimelb.edu.au

• **GAMSAT:** The Graduate Australian Medical School Admission Test is sat by people who have completed a bachelor degree or who are nearing the end of their bachelor studies. If you do well in it, you can magically transport yourself into a medical degree. You may also be able to use it to gain entry to non-graduate medical schools.

Why some unis require you to have a degree BEFORE you study medicine

The requirement for graduate entry began appearing at Australian unis in the late 1990s. One of the reasons for the change was to escape the tendency for all medical students to be the stereotypical white, middle-class 'high achievers'.

The theory goes like this: there are degrees more academically tricky than medicine. But probably no degree with as many complications requiring empathy, a cool head, maturity, stamina, humility, etc.

Graduate medical schools also aim at getting applicants who *really* want to be doctors – people who have experienced other things and still want to do medicine. This is opposed to the very bright Year 12ers who do medicine to prove how bright they are (medicine is, of course, one of those 'status' degrees).

"I'm grateful for the more circumspect perspective I bring to medicine as a result of not going straight from school to uni," Dash says.

She is also a recipient of the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship, which enables her to spend time pursuing career-related interests like undertaking an Indigenous Research Internship position with Onemda in Melbourne during her summer holidays.

The Wesley College Foundation supports Dash to live on campus at Sydney Uni, and she is loving her first taste of uni medicine.

Dash says she wants to be involved in expanding Australia's Indigenous medical workforce and she plans to encourage other Indigenous people to consider a career in health.

"Indigenous people deserve the chance to achieve their education and life goals, and to fulfil their potential individually, and as communities," she says.

"I hope I can make medical care friendlier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by making a visit to the doctor a positive, collaborative experience."

Dash's key career steps

- Finishes Year 12 and works at Maccas.
- Maccas pays the bills and she can fit distance education around it.
- Personal events inspire her to do medicine, and cultural identity a major driver.
- Uses smaller, distance education steps to reach degree.
- Brings a wealth of experience, maturity and inspiration to a career as a doctor.