FROM UNCERTAINTY TO ACTION

I used to think good leadership meant having a good idea and making it happen. However, Laidlaw taught me knowing when to act, when to listen, and when to change course.

A journey through research, community and action



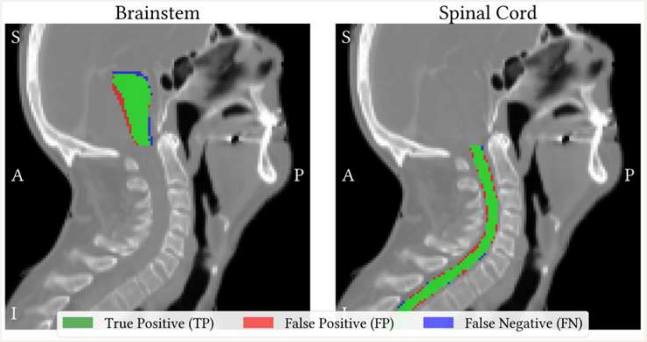
WHERE IT BEGAN — CUMBERLAND LODGE

01 RESEARCH

LEARNING TO STAY WITH THE UNKNOWN

My research introduced me to automated segmentation in head-and-neck radiotherapy, using medical images to study how accurately structures such as the brainstem and spinal cord could be identified.
More importantly, it taught me to be comfortable with incomplete answers: to examine failures, question assumptions, and keep working when the solution wasn't straight forward.

Where prediction and reality disagree is often where the interesting questions begin.



02 LEADERSHIP IN ACTION • KUNSHAN, CHINA

LEARNING WHEN NOT TO FOLLOW THE PLAN



PUBLIC HOSPITAL
NUCLEAR MEDICINE
KUNSHAN, CHINA

WE ARRIVED WITH A PLAN.
To investigate radiation-protection practice in a public hospital.

REALITY DISAGREED.
The hospital already had established procedures, experienced staff and regular oversight. The problem we prepared to solve wasn't the one people there needed us to solve.

SO WE LISTENED.
Clinician conversations and around 300 public questionnaire responses pointed towards a different challenge: patient understanding of medical radiation and imaging history.

AND CHANGED COURSE.
We pivoted towards patient-facing educational materials and a prototype digital tool to move the project forward without forcing the original plan through.

ACT
Good ideas are common.
Execution turns them into change.

ADAPT
Reality gets the final say.
Changing direction is not failure when the question has changed.

CONNECT
People matter.
The right community makes uncertainty easier to move through.

A PLAN IS USEFUL. KNOWING WHEN TO ABANDON IT IS LEADERSHIP.

03 COMMUNITY

LEARNING TO BE A LITTLE BRAVER

Some of the most important parts of Laidlaw happened outside formal projects. Cumberland Lodge threw me into unfamiliar teams, activities and conversations. By Durham, many of those unfamiliar people had become friends. That community made it easier to speak before I had perfected the sentence, negotiate, take initiative — and occasionally do things that are best not to include on an academic poster.



Good conversations travel well.



The best part? The friends made along the way.

Some stories are probably best left off the poster :-)



An impressive lesson from Durham: leadership conferences can also radically expand your experience of vegan catering

04 SO...WHAT CHANGED?

I STILL LIKE STRUCTURE. I JUST DO NOT NEED IT TO ALREADY EXIST.

I am now more comfortable approaching people without knowing exactly where the conversation will lead, asking questions without already having the answer, negotiating priorities, and creating enough structure to move something forward.
More recently, that has meant starting conversations with the British Thyroid Foundation about how my scientific background might be useful as a volunteer. There was no predefined role or obvious next step, and the starting point was simply asking where I could help.

I USED TO WAIT FOR CLARITY BEFORE ACTING.

SOMETIMES, CLARITY COMES FROM ACTING.