

6minutes **News**

# 'I googled how to make a podcast and started recording': Dr Amanda Nikolic on her surgery podcast **First Incision**

It started out as a study aid, but now Dr Amanda Nikolic's podcast has hit 250,000 streams around the world.



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Edit



Dr Amanda Nikolic.

As a podcaster's devotee, one of the first things Dr Amanda Nikolic did to prepare for her general surgery fellowship exams was to look for a series to help her study. 9631

She found only a few international surgical podcasts and none with an Australian flavour.

So, she bought a microphone on Amazon, googled 'how to make a podcast' and started recording her own. It was the midst of Melbourne's first lockdown in 2020.

Almost 120 episodes and four years later, that podcast called *First Incision* has been streamed 250,000 times and listened to by doctors around the world.

"As the surgery fellowship is a half written, half clinical exam, back then I thought it'd be useful to practise talking out loud and to have my own notes to listen back to," Dr Nikolic explains.

"I never actually thought anything would come of it."

Having made it as a Royal Australasian College of Surgeons fellow, she is now working as a general surgeon at Fiona Stanley Hospital in Perth.

But her podcast continues, often featuring interviews from top-flight Australian and New Zealand surgeons such as Associate Professor Julie Howle, a surgical oncologist from Westmead Hospital in Sydney who discussed soft tissue sarcoma and retroperitoneal sarcoma.

In another, Dr James Mackay, a New Zealand general and trauma surgeon, went through the finer details of chest trauma.

She also talks to experts on ways to prepare for exams, issues around finance and in one podcast, how it feels to take that leap from registrar to fellow.

In terms of stats on downloads and streams, episodes she thinks might prove popular with listeners can languish while other topics prove unexpected hits with would-be surgeons.

"Interestingly, it's always something I don't expect that has the most downloads," she said.

"For a while, a gastric cancer podcast episode was really, really popular, and I don't know why. It's usually not what I would expect.

"But I don't keep much of an eye on stats. It's just interesting to see what's done well."

Her favourite episode was an interview with Dr Sarah Dalton, a paediatrician and doctor performance coach, on how to manage stress, the power of mindset and maximising performance during exams.

"Initially the podcasts were just my own study notes on the different topics covering the curriculum," she said.

“Then I started asking surgeons that I knew to do episodes on more complex parts of a topic, or ones that people may struggle with, or the more controversial ones, such as the use of watch and wait in the management of rectal cancer.”<sup>9631</sup>

Now she is contacted by doctors from all over the world who have found her material helpful in preparing for a surgical exam, including one South African educator from Cape Town who has included it in his curriculum.

Other doctors message her to say they listen to it on their commutes, or when breastfeeding in the middle of the night as they prepare for their big exam.

“The guests are so generous with their time and sharing their knowledge in a way that is so selfless and so lovely,” she said.

But the logistics demand a big time commitment, particularly the editing which Dr Nikolic has taught herself from YouTube.

She has estimated that every minute of content takes four minutes of editing, so a 45-minute episode takes a few hours of work.

It has also come with a bit of fame as she discovered at an overseas conference.

“In one of the introductory sessions, I was playing *Pac-Man* with a friend, and we were being a bit loud,” she recalled.

“This guy walks over to me, and says, ‘I know who you are. You’re Amanda Nikolic from *First Incision*,’ because he’d recognised my voice.

“He was from Canada, and we’re at a conference in America, so that sort of stuff has been fun.”

Dr Nikolic says she wants to subspecialise in colorectal surgery as well as learn more about trauma surgery, as she has just joined the Army Reserve.

Her goal with the podcast is to round out the general surgery curriculum and then continue its evolution as her career changes.

“I think ‘What challenge am I going through? What challenge am I talking to my mates about that they’re going through too. How can we normalise that?’” Dr Nikolic said.

“Or what other resources could I put through the podcast to help others going through the same thing?”

“I think it’ll morph with me as I move through my career and through these transitions.”