



Faculty of Occupational Medicine



Have you considered a career in Occupational Medicine?

Do you know that...

- UK occupational physicians work all over the world?
- Occupational medicine special interests include aviation and space, travel, radiation and diving?



Becoming a specialist in occupational medicine

What is Occupational medicine?

Occupational medicine is the medical specialty which covers the multi-faceted relationship between health and work.

It is concerned with ensuring that workplaces and work practices are healthy, safe and not detrimental to employees' health, and that employees are fit for the job they are doing. If there are problems, either with the workplace or with an employee's fitness, the occupational physician's role is to advise on adjustments to the workplace, and/or to give appropriate advice and support to the employer and employee.

Occupational medicine has an important part to play in rehabilitating employees back into work after sickness or injury, something currently high on the government's agenda. The driving force behind this is twofold. First and foremost, employment is, in general, good for people – economically, socially, psychologically and in terms of general well-being. There is also a financial imperative, given that many millions of working days are lost every year, many unnecessarily, to the nation's economy.

Providing high quality objective professional advice, sometimes in difficult situations, and with an awareness of the various agendas of government, employers, employees, trades unions and pensions trusts, is a demanding role.

Occupational medicine also plays a key role in providing impartial, evidence-based advice to third parties, such as insurance and pension companies, about retirement on grounds of ill-health and related matters.



“ My work has taken me to most parts of the world – to meet with research collaborators, participate in scientific conferences and workshops, and teach on courses. It involves long hours, but I have a lot of choice about exactly what I do and when. In retrospect, I would not have chosen a different career ”

Occupational Physician

“ You can train in occupational medicine in a variety of settings. I started my training with an external provider of occupational health services, moving to in-house provision at the end of my training. Working for a variety of blue chip clients and in different industries was not only invaluable experience for training, but is one of the most enjoyable and unique aspects of the speciality of occupational medicine. You can find yourself in a clinic dealing with similar medical problems in patients with very different jobs – some with serious safety implications if the work is of a safety-critical nature. Being flexible and adapting to the different situations is something I relished when I started my training. ”

Trainee Occupational Physician

What makes an occupational physician?

The occupational physician must have not only a sound clinical background but also knowledge of employment and anti-discrimination legislation, as well as of environmental and health and safety law.

Occupational physicians must also have an understanding of epidemiology, disease prevention and toxicology. They have to be able to identify, assess the risk to health of, and know how to control workplace hazards and also know how to recognise, prevent and manage occupational disease. They also advise management on these risks and on their implications for employees' health and for business continuity. Management and IT skills are also required.

In assessing for fitness for work, occupational physicians need to understand not only the health of the employee but also the workplace context – taking into account the workforce and the psychological and physical environment – and any implications this may have for the employee's health. They must therefore have a sound working knowledge of the workplace and its hazards.

Occupational physicians must be effective communicators. They work closely with occupational health nurses and with colleagues in primary and secondary care. They also have to be able to relate effectively to other health professionals such as occupational hygienists and ergonomists, as well as to employees, management, human resources and safety professionals, trade unions and staff representatives in the workplace.

They need to be aware of the potential to promote health in the workplace, by working



with employers on improving workplace practices, and by working with employees on making lifestyle changes.

Occupational physicians work not only in the NHS and the Defence Medical Services, but also in a wide range of public sector, commercial and industrial settings, including aviation, nuclear power plants, call centres, building sites, oil rigs, shops and factories.

There are opportunities to develop special interest areas such as Travel Medicine, Disability Assessment Medicine, Aviation Medicine, Occupational Dermatology, Occupational Respiratory Medicine, Sports and Exercise Medicine, Radiation Medicine and Diving Medicine. Occupational health is prominent on political and business agendas and there is currently a high level of demand for occupational physicians.

“ I have time in clinic to take a holistic approach for all my patients and navigate management plans through often complex clinical, psychological and social issues.

I can go on workplace visits (for example undertaking health surveillance in a metal workshop and in a bakery) and I am a trained mediator, helping to resolve interpersonal difficulties between staff members. I have to be aware of legal and employment issues; and my academic training also gives a fascinating insight into toxicology, occupational hygiene and ergonomics. ”

Trainee Occupational Physician

How do I train to become an occupational physician?

To train for this demanding but rewarding career, doctors are invited to join the Faculty of Occupational Medicine as Specialty Registrars (StRs). This is a faculty of the Royal College of Physicians of London, but has operated as an independent organisation since 1978, and is responsible for all higher specialist training in occupational medicine in the UK.

Higher specialist training is conducted in approved training posts in GMC-approved training programmes and is supervised by consultant occupational physicians, who are approved trainers recognised by the GMC. Posts are available in the NHS, in a wide variety of industries and within the Defence Medical Services. StRs keep a personal training record and are subject to annual assessments (ARCPs – see below) by the National School of Occupational Health (NSOH) in England and Wales or their equivalent Education and Training Board within the devolved countries (Scotland and Northern Ireland). The Defence Medical Services Deanery undertakes its own ARCPs. Less than full time training (LTFT) may be available if agreed with the local Postgraduate Dean. There are opportunities to apply for inter deanery transfers (IDTs) for both NHS and industrial trainees.

Doctors wishing to train in occupational medicine begin specialist training in Specialty Training Year 3 (ST3), having first undertaken two years of general medical training in other fields of medicine (in years ST1 and ST2) in accordance with the FOM Person Specification, specialty training normally takes four years, if undertaken full time.

All StRs have to pass examinations, in the first (ST3) and third or final years of specialist training. In addition, trainees have to produce a research project and undergo workplace-based assessments. These are formative assessments – that is their primary purpose is to support teaching and learning through directed feedback – and they also help to inform the ARCP, conducted by the NSOH or their local LETB.

How to apply

There are occupational medicine specialist training posts in the NHS, the Defence Medical Services and in industry (including the public sector).

As regards training in the NHS, the national recruitment for occupational medicine is managed by the NSOH and groups together all NHS ST3 vacancies. The process runs twice a year, usually in February and August, and the National Occupational Medicine ST3 listing is published via NHS Jobs. The process outline and the breakdown of available posts are viewable in the details of this group listing. It is highly recommended that you sign up for the NSOH newsletter through their website and/or contact them at nationalschoolocchealth@nwl.hee.nhs.uk

As regards training in industry or the non-NHS public sector, these employers are free to advertise their training vacancies according to their preference, but most use BMJ Careers. All industry candidates will be required to attend an NSOH National Recruitment Assessment for benchmarking to obtain a training number.

Training posts in the Defence Medical Services are open to doctors who are already serving Medical Officers. Doctors who complete training in the Defence Medical Services will have the same competencies and skills as their civilian counterparts and these candidates also have to benchmark through the NSOH.

How to become a specialist via the CESR route

The CESR (Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration) route to specialist registration is aimed at doctors who have not completed a GMC approved training programme but who are able to show that they have undertaken similar training as would be the case in a GMC approved post. They have to demonstrate that they meet the requirements with regard to training, qualifications, experience and competencies, by submitting their evidence of this to the GMC.

Doctors wishing to enter the specialty with the intention of achieving specialist status via the CESR route, rather than by formal specialty training, should go to the FOM and GMC websites for full information. This will provide information on this route including reference to the occupational medicine specialty specific guidance.



Demonstrating an interest in occupational medicine

When applying for specialist training, doctors should demonstrate an interest in occupational medicine. Examples of how this might be done are:

- Demonstrating evidence of recognition of the role of workplace exposures in generating ill health; this might be illustrated by clinical cases that have been managed in previous practice
- Participation or interest in GP provision of occupational health services
- Contact with or visits to local occupational health departments, occupational physicians or the any of FOM's Regional Specialty Advisers
- Readership of relevant journals, e.g. Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Occupational Medicine
- Demonstration of awareness of workplace health issues of topical interest and current policy developments
- Membership of the Society of Occupational Medicine

Further information

More information can be found at fom.ac.uk or by emailing training@fom.ac.uk

FOM publications:

- Fitness for Work
- Good Occupational Medical Practice
- Guidance on Ethics for Occupational Physicians
- Guidance on Alcohol and Drug Misuse in the Workplace

Useful websites:

- General Medical Council: gmc-uk.org
- Health and Safety Executive: hse.gov.uk
- Department for Work and Pensions: dwp.gov.uk
- SEQOHS (accreditation system for occupational health services): seqohs.org
- Society of Occupational Medicine: som.org.uk

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