



Life as an occupational physician

One of a series of profiles of doctors working in occupational medicine



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I entered specialist training in occupational medicine after I qualified as a GP. The impact of work on health was an area that I found increasingly important to the overall wellbeing of my patients.

I trained in “Industry”; outside of the NHS, and have been fortunate to work for a number of high profile organisations and safety-critical industries, including the BBC, BT, London Fire Brigade, and as part of the in-house services at London Underground and British Airways.

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 specialty 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.

For me, occupational medicine allows a combination of clinical work and management – balancing the doctor-patient relationship, the needs of the business and consideration of health & safety legislation. This interaction between the doctor, patient and their employer is unique. Few doctors can gain such access to a patient’s place of work and be able to truly assess specific tasks and a patient’s fitness for them. For some doctors, a large amount of their work can be out

and about in the workplace, doing visits. Communicating with groups of employees or managers on workplace illnesses, such as respiratory and skin disease is another rewarding role of the OH doctor.

OH provides an opportunity to work in a variety of industries, be it NHS, safety-critical work, or covering occupations with special hazards (such as diving, aviation or radiation workers), and protecting the health and wellbeing of a workforce.

Having an intimate knowledge of a workplace and the roles within it, allows OH doctors to interpret a patient's medical conditions, symptoms and limitations in the bigger picture; to keep or return people to work in the right job at the right time with the right adjustments.