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Faculty of Occupational Medicine
of the Royal College of Physicians



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 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 employee.

Occupational medicine has an important part to play in rehabilitating employees back into work, after sickness or injury. Rehabilitation is currently high on the government's agenda. The driving force behind this is twofold: both a recognition that employment is, in general, good for people – economically, socially, psychologically and in terms of general well-being – and also that many millions of work days are lost every year, some 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

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 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.



“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.”

Trainee Occupational Physician

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.

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 management, trade unions and staff representatives in the workplace.

They need to be aware of the potential to promote health, 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 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, 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.

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 and supervised by consultant occupational physicians, in an approved training programme. 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 by the local Postgraduate Dean – which must be satisfactory. Less than full time training (LTFTT) training may be available, if agreed with the local Postgraduate Dean.



“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 our academic training also gives a fascinating insight into toxicology, occupational hygiene and ergonomics.”

Trainee Occupational Physician

Doctors wishing to train in occupational medicine enter specialist training in Specialty Training Year 3 (ST3), having first undertaken two years of general medical training (in years ST1 and ST2). The length of the training programme is indicative, and the acquisition of competencies, rather than completion of length of training, is the goal.

All specialist trainees have to pass examinations, in the first (ST3) and final years of specialist training. In addition, trainees have to produce a dissertation 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 Annual Review of Competence Progression (ARCP), conducted by the deanery.

How to apply for entry to a training programme

There are occupational medicine specialist training posts in the NHS, in the private sector. Posts in both sectors have to be approved by the General Medical Council and all appointments to these posts have to be approved by the local deanery. Posts are nationally advertised, normally in the BMJ.

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.

Further information is available from the Faculty, (tel. 020 3116 6904 or email: emma.dawson@facocmed.ac.uk) your local deanery and the relevant home country portal of the Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) website.

How to apply 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 an approved post. They have to demonstrate that they meet the requirements, with regard to training, qualifications and experience, by submitting their evidence of this to the GMC.

Doctors wishing to enter the specialty by the CESR route should go to the GMC website for full information. This will provide information on how to apply, 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:

- 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/interest in GP provision of occupational health services
- Contact with/visits to local occupational health departments, occupational physicians, or the Regional Specialty Advisers
- Readership of relevant journals, eg Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Occupational Health
- Demonstration of awareness of workplace health issues of topical interest and current policy developments
- Membership of the Society of Occupational Medicine

Further information

Faculty of Occupational Medicine: www.facocmed.ac.uk

Faculty publications:

- Fitness for Work
 - Guidance on Ethics for Occupational Physicians
 - Guidance on Alcohol and Drug Misuse in the Workplace
 - Creating a Healthy Workplace (with the Faculty of Public Health)
 - The Health and Work Handbook (with the Society of Occupational Medicine and the Royal College of General Practitioners)
 - National Guideline on the Occupational Aspects of the Management of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (with NHS Plus)
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General Medical Council: www.gmc-uk.org

Modernising Medical Careers (MMC): www.mmc.nhs.uk

Health and Safety Executive: www.hse.gov.uk

Department for Work and Pensions: <http://dwp.gov.uk>

SEQOHS (accreditation system for occupational health services):
www.seqohs.org

Health and Work Development Unit:
<http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/resources/clinical-resources/health-and-work>

Society of Occupational Medicine: www.som.org.uk



Faculty of Occupational Medicine
at the Royal College of Physicians

3rd Floor, New Derwent House
69-73 Theobald's Road
London
WC1X 8TA

t: 020 7242 8698

f: 020 3116 6900

e: fom@facocmed.ac.uk

www.facocmed.ac.uk

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