



Life as an occupational physician

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



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As an academic occupational physician, I have a varied and extremely rewarding job.

My epidemiological research has covered a wide range of health problems related to work, including hip osteoarthritis in farmers, knee osteoarthritis from occupational kneeling, infectious pneumonia in workers exposed to metal fume, cutaneous warts in butchers, and various known and suspected occupational causes of cancer. Currently I have a particular interest in cultural and psychological influences on work-related illness and disability. It is especially pleasing to conduct studies that have immediate practical application through their influence on regulatory policy or occupational health practice.

In addition to my personal research, I have been heavily involved in the interpretation and application of science more widely through service on national and international scientific advisory committees (e.g. on outdoor air pollutants, social security compensation for occupational diseases, health effects of mobile phones, depleted uranium in Gulf War veterans, pesticides and the toxicity of chemicals in food and the environment). I have chaired four such committees, and the work has taken me into diverse areas of science, ranging from the physics of magnetic fields and engineering aspects of mobile telecommunications, through exotoxicology and agronomy, to psychology and anthropology.

It has also entailed frequent public communication, both directly at meetings, and also through the media (including John Humphreys on *Today*, the *Jimmy Young Show*, and *Newsnight*).

And I have not even mentioned my role as FOM President!

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.

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