



ROYAL SOCIETY of MEDICINE Career Handbook

ST3 | Senior Doctor

Kaji Sritharan and Muhunthan Thillai

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ST3 - Senior Doctor

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To my Ammah and Appah – for giving me the courage and support to follow my dreams.

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Now you're at the top...what next?)

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We thank you all.

Introduction

Studying for an MBA at Harvard Business School is an opportunity only available to a select few. Only the very best, the most able and the hardest working make the cut. However, in the words of the school themselves, the MBA is not the final destination for these students, but *an important point of transition that prepares them for the opportunities that lie ahead*. Getting through your foundation years and the first years of specialist training is much like this. Only the very best will make it on to the specialist training programme of their choice but for those that do, this is just the beginning. The opportunities open to them will be immense and the choices and decisions that lie ahead often daunting.

Whether you want to be a successful full-time partner in a lucrative general practice, an inner city cardiologist or a part-time audiologist, getting to the top of your chosen specialty, especially in the current job market, can be a challenging process. The competition will be fierce as your colleagues all jostle for limited places in specialty training. Even once you have made it through this bottleneck, you will have to work hard to stand out from the crowd; above all you will have to decide how hard you are prepared to work and whether the sacrifices you need to make to get to where you want to go, are worth making.

The choices available to you are immense and the decisions you make will affect not only your career but also your life as a whole. Do you take time out of training to do research and should it be a three year lab-based PhD or a two year clinical MD? Do you accept that subspecialty training post in Edinburgh or are you better off applying for a Fellowship in New Zealand? Is it worth doing a teaching course or is your time better invested elsewhere?

Even choices that should be straightforward may, in reality, be difficult. How should you prepare for your ST3 interview? Should you continue as

a salaried GP or try and look for a partnership? How do you manage your time both in and outside of work? Is it worth getting critical care cover or is life insurance enough?

In this second book, we have tried to address some of these more difficult decisions that you will be forced to make in your career as you become a more senior doctor. Not everyone wants to be a heart surgeon but whatever you choose, we hope that you will find the information in this book useful. Work hard, play hard and have a little faith in your own abilities. Everything else will fall into place.

Kaji Sritharan and Muhunthan Thillai
London

ST3 applications

Key aims of this chapter

- Choose the right specialty for you
- Define the application process
- Complete the application form.

Introduction

As a reader of this book you will probably have been a doctor for several years. Some of you will have decided that you are destined to be neurosurgeons, and will still be weighing up the merits of a career in anaesthetics versus one in respiratory medicine or general practice. For some, however, the right specialty will remain elusive. Importantly, every doctor is different and each will have different aspirations for the future. Moreover, these aspirations are likely to change over time as different priorities in your life become apparent.

Now is an important junction in your career and it is likely that the decisions you make at this point will significantly influence the course of your medical path. The aim of this chapter is to give you practical advice on how to choose a specialty and to guide you through the application process.

Which is the right specialty for me?

Making a career choice

No one can tell you which career is the right career for you, except you. There are, though, a number of factors that may influence your decision making and help you decide to pursue one specialty rather than another.

The current job market for your specialty

The competition for consultant posts at present for most hospital-based specialties is intense. Moreover, with the NHS struggling to manage debt (and therefore a general reluctance for Trusts to take on permanent staff), and a move towards centralisation of specialist services and to manage a greater proportion of patients in the community; the availability of consultant posts in hospital-based specialties is unlikely to improve dramatically in the future. That said, specialties may evolve and, as governments change, so may the plans for healthcare delivery. Therefore, although there may not be many posts in any one specialty now, in five or six years' time when you finish your training things may have opened up.

The competition for posts

If you feel that you have a 'weak' CV, you should take into account the competition for a specialty before applying, and you may even use the competition ratios to make a shortlist of the specialties that are appropriate for you (Table 1.1). Although the competition for a specialty will vary from

Table 1.1: Round 1 competition ratios for higher specialty training in 2011 (source: Modernising Medical Careers, www.mmc.nhs.uk)

Specialty	Posts available	Applications submitted	Competition ratio (applications per posts)
Acute medicine	109	351	3.22
Cardiology	94	607	6.46
Clinical pharmacology and therapeutics	15	21	1.40
Endocrinology and diabetes	85	265	3.12
Gastroenterology	94	441	4.69
General surgery	110	548	4.98
Geriatric medicine	115	307	2.67
Genitourinary medicine	42	74	1.76
Haematology	79	249	3.15
Neurology	43	161	3.74
Nuclear medicine	5	9	1.80
Palliative medicine	39	124	3.18
Plastic surgery	35	177	5.06
Psychiatry	219	550	2.51
Renal medicine	55	157	2.85
Respiratory medicine	120	408	3.40

year to year, certain specialties, such as general surgery, will always be popular and therefore competitive.

You should also compare your CV to the essential and desired qualities required within the 'person specification' for a post. Average candidates will meet *all* of the essential criteria and some of the desirable criteria, whereas excellent job candidates will meet *all* of the essential as well as *many* desirable qualities.

Opportunities to travel

If this is something that is important to you, certain specialties are more accommodating and easier to use as a base to travel from or with. For example, joining the military offers excellent surgical training opportunities and the ability to travel extensively, while becoming a GP will give you the flexibility to spend periods away doing voluntary work abroad.

Your research interests

During your undergraduate training, or indeed as a junior doctor, you may have had the opportunity to perform research. Some people flourish in this environment, while others are driven to despair. If you fall into the former category, you may want to take your research interests further and you should consider undertaking a PhD or MD at this stage or applying for an academic run-through position or lecturer post.

Your personality

Personality assessment tools, such as the Myers-Briggs test, are gaining in popularity in medicine, in particular in relation to developing management skills. In terms of determining your future career their role is less clear. Some research suggests that doctors within different specialties have different personality types, but all personality types are seen within all specialties. This suggests that, although determining your personality type may usefully facilitate discussion of the pros and cons of a career in relation to your personality, it by no means excludes you from any career, nor can it be used to find your perfect career. Another important fact is that both your personality type and your specialty are likely to change during the 40+ years of your career in medicine.

Deciding which specialty to apply to can be a difficult decision, one that you shouldn't try to make alone. Careers advice is available from your deanery, and your allocated educational or clinical supervisor and specialist royal

college may also be able to help. In addition, you should speak to seniors within the specialty you are considering.

An approach to decision making

The UK Medical Careers website (www.medicalcareers.nhs.uk) advocates a four-stage approach to career planning.

Self-assessment

This is a process of understanding yourself – your strengths, interests (this is not necessarily the same as the things you are good at) and weaknesses – and it is helpful to write a list. Personality testing (e.g. a Myers–Briggs test) can also form a useful part of this process of self-discovery.

Additionally, list the factors that are important to you in terms of both your personal life (e.g. need for work–life balance, flexibility of hours, short training period) and work life (e.g. patient demographics, variety of caseload, clinical autonomy).

Career exploration

Review the list of specialties available or those that you have already shortlisted as a career and critically appraise each in terms of:

- what the job entails
- what it takes to succeed in that specialty (e.g. will you be spending weekends and evenings writing papers or book chapters?)
- the benefits or advantages
- the opportunities it presents (e.g. travel, research)
- the disadvantages.

Decision making

Having determined what drives you and evaluated the specialties available, you should be closer to arriving at a decision – or certainly have narrowed down your list of choices. Your ideal specialty should instil some excitement in you and provide you with a balance between your personal needs and your professional goals.

Plan implementation

Now that you have decided on a specialty (you may want to apply to more than one), you must plan how to reach your goal. This book intends to guide you through this journey. This chapter will give you advice about the application

process, Chapter 2 discusses how you can achieve success at interview, and Chapter 12 gives guidance on how to make the most of your specialty training – including developing your CV and portfolio. The latter should demonstrate your commitment to, and enthusiasm for, the specialty you have chosen.

How do I apply?

Where to apply

Applications to specialty training programmes are managed by either a single 'lead deanery' or one of the royal colleges on behalf of the deaneries. The process of application is coordinated on a national level. Thus only one application is required for any one specialty, and on your application form you will be asked to rank in order your preferred regions for training. The exceptions to this are the smaller specialties, where they may not be a delegated 'lead deanery' or appointed college. In this situation, application for a training programme is made directly to the deanery advertising the post.

For all specialties the process of application is online and you can apply to as many specialties as you wish provided you meet the eligibility and competency level criteria for the post.

The person specification

This outlines the essential and desirable criteria required in order to apply for a training programme. The specifications are readily available for all specialties through the Medical Specialty Training (England) website (www.mmc.nhs.uk) from November of any given application year.

You should study the person specification for your specialty early in your medical career, ideally well before the specialty application process (i.e. as a foundation or core trainee). It should serve as a benchmark and focus for the development of your CV and portfolio. Thinking about this early will stand you in good stead for applying to specialty positions, as your CV and portfolio are likely to have a clearer direction.

Types of post

There are two main types of specialty training programme:

- 'Run-through' training is where there is seamless progression from core training (referred to as ST1/ST2) to specialty training (ST3 to ST5/6 typically) on the proviso that the necessary competency requirements are met.

- ‘Uncoupled’ training programmes are where, following two years of core training (CT1/CT2) (three years in some specialties), there is open competition into specialty training (ST3 to ST5/6 typically) posts.

Academic clinical fellowships (ACFs) offer run-through training in specialties that are normally uncoupled; see www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk/intetacatrain for more details.

The endpoint of a specialty training programme is the certificate of completion of training (CCT) or equivalent, which will grant you entry on to the General Medical Council’s specialist or GP register. For those who have undertaken a non-standard training, the endpoint is the certificate of eligibility for specialist or general practice registration (CESR) (Box 1.1).

What are FTSTAs?

Fixed-term specialty training appointments (FTSTAs) are one-year stand-alone training posts that exist in run-through specialties such as neurosurgery and paediatrics. They are useful to undertake if you want to experience a particular specialty before committing to it, or if you need more time to fulfill the entry requirements for ST training or make your CV more competitive before applying. It is well worth remembering that, if you are successful in obtaining an FTSTA position, your chances of subsequently obtaining a run-through post at ST2 will be low, as there will be very few of these posts available.

When should I apply?

The *first round* of recruitment into specialty training in the UK kicks off in late November for CT1/2 posts and CT3 posts in psychiatry and

It is possible to train flexibly (i.e. part-time) if you can demonstrate that training on a full-time basis is not feasible or practicable for you, for clear reasons such as a disability, illness or carer responsibilities. The same competency requirements as for full-time trainees exist in order to attain your certificate of completion of training (CCT) or certificate of eligibility for specialist registration (CESR), but the length of training to achieve these competencies will be longer.

Box 1.1 Flexible training

emergency medicine and ST1/4 run-through posts – with a deadline for closure of applications in mid-December and interviews and offers made by early March. Applications for all uncoupled ST3 posts, previously unadvertised CT2 posts and CT2 posts in anaesthetics start in early February, with interviews held in April and offers made shortly thereafter.

The exact timing of the application process may vary subtly among the different recruiting offices, but all will in general follow the national timetable. Each recruitment office should publicise the timeline of the recruitment process on their website well in advance, so this will allow you to plan submitting your application, and ear-marking time off for potential interviews. Posts will typically be advertised for a minimum of four weeks on the recruiting office and NHS Jobs websites.

Each recruitment office oversees:

- publicising the timeline for their recruitment process
- advertising posts
- giving guidance on completing application forms
- receiving and shortlisting online applications
- coordinating the interview process
- advising you about the outcome of your application.

The recruitment process for academic clinical fellowships is run by the National Institute for Health Research Trainees Coordinating Centre (www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk). It usually starts in mid-October, with the deadline for applications in mid-November, and interviews conducted and offers given by the end of January. Similarly, the recruitment process into general practice also differs from that for other specialties. The application process for GPs opens in mid-November and closes in early December. Applicants shortlisted for GP training are then required to undertake a marked test and attend a GP assessment centre, with offers issued by early March.

Who can apply?

In order to apply for a specialty training programme or post you must meet the eligibility criteria by either the start of the post or by closure of the application date. These criteria include the following:

- You must meet the national person specifications for the post.
- You must be registered with the General Medical Council (GMC) or the General Dental Council (GDC).

- You must be entitled to work in the United Kingdom. UK and EEA nationals are eligible to apply to specialty training posts. Non-UK or non-EEA nationals with limited leave to remain in the UK, whose employment requires a Tier 2 visa, are subject to the resident labour market test and will be considered only if there are no suitable UK or EEA national candidates for the post; so they may apply in round 2 (see below) but not round 1 of the application process.
- There must be evidence of your English language skills. If your undergraduate training was not in English, you will need to provide evidence of English language skills, such as your International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score. If your undergraduate training was in English, but not in the UK, you will need written evidence to verify this.
- For ST3 entry to the medical specialties you will need to have passed Part 2 written examination but not the PACES (Part 2 clinical examination) component of the MRCP(UK) exam at the time of receiving an offer for a post. You should have completed all components of the exam before taking up the position. For ST3 entry to the surgical specialties, you should have successfully completed all components of the MRCS (see Chapter 3).
- To be eligible to apply for ST1 and CT1 posts you cannot have held a post in the specialty you are applying to for more than 18 months (exceptions being chemical pathology, histopathology, medical microbiology, virology, and public health). There is no limit on experience for eligibility for entry at ST2/CT2/ST3/ST4.
- You must show evidence of achievement of foundation competences. This can be demonstrated in three ways:
 - confirmation of the name of your foundation school if you are currently in foundation training
 - award of a foundation achievement of competence document (FACD)
 - submission of alternative evidence of completion of acquisition of foundation competencies.

Advice about applications can be obtained (usually by email) from individual deaneries or from the Department of Health's Medical Education and Training Programme (England) national support helpdesk (see the end of this chapter). All emails should be answered within 48 hours or, if further information or investigation is required, within five working days.

Round 2 of recruitment

Round 2 of the application process mops up jobs not filled in round 1 and includes new posts that have arisen during the year. It starts when