

So you want to be a Dermatologist

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Dermatology is a medical specialty involving the management of skin conditions. It is one of the most diverse specialties treating patients from all age groups with inflammatory, inherited, environmental, occupational and malignant skin diseases.

Dermatology is predominantly outpatient based within the hospital. However, patients with acute systemic upset or severe inflammatory or blistering skin disorders frequently require specialist care within a day-care or dermatology inpatient facility.

Dermatologists link closely with other specialities and we are frequently asked to provide consults on hospital inpatients.

Skin cancer comprises a large and ever increasing volume of a Dermatologist's workload and skin surgery is integral to the service. Complex skin cancer cases are discussed weekly at the Skin Cancer Multidisciplinary meeting. We work closely with our colleagues from Pathology, Plastic surgery, Ophthalmology, ENT & Oncology.

Dermatology training includes subspecialty experience in areas such as Paediatric dermatology, phototherapy/photobiology, dermatopathology, allergic disorders and dermatological surgery. The field of medical dermatology has really taken off, with many dermatologists running specific chronic disease clinics for the patients on immunosuppressive therapy. The development and licensing of the biological therapies for conditions such as psoriasis have helped transform patient's lives. With new drugs continuing to evolve it is an exciting time for both patients and clinicians.

Most consultant dermatologists develop a subspecialty interest and are encouraged to spend time in specialised centres elsewhere in the UK or further afield. Participation in research and medical education is also encouraged.

Medical students unfortunately gain limited exposure to Dermatology, usually within the third year of studies, but the length of placement varies around the UK from none at all to 2 weeks. This is too short a time to secure a firm knowledge of the speciality, particularly when you consider that up to 20% of GP consultations relate to skin conditions.

Dermatology is a competitive speciality so career planning is crucial. It is important to demonstrate interest in the speciality and it is most valuable to gain clinical experience before pursuing higher specialist training. As an undergraduate there are Special Study Modules which are helpful at providing an insight to the life of a Dermatologist. Taster modules can also be arranged for foundation year doctors.

To further a career in Dermatology junior doctors are encouraged to apply for a core medical training post at either CT 1 or CT 2 level to gain experience in the speciality. ST3 posts are always competitive and full MRCP is required prior to taking up a training post. An alternative career path is as a specialty doctor in dermatology.

Dermatology specialist training is 4 years. During this time trainees are encouraged to attend a number of core specialty courses and meetings.

Training can be extended by 2 or 3 years if time is taken out to complete an academic degree to MD or PhD level. Recently the Specialty Certificate Examination (SCE) was introduced and this is now sat in year 2 of training.

So what is your week like.....Consultants will do 5 outpatient clinics, 2 ward rounds, attend the Skin Cancer MDM and carry out regular liaison ward work. Teaching of the medical students and junior doctors is built into the weekly timetable. Most UK units have a core teaching session, which all doctors attend, and this involves clinical cases, audit, journal club and guest lectures. On call varies around the UK, with many units having lost their on call service. Dermatology units who are still able to provide out of hours cover are on call from home.

So do you want to be a Dermatologist? It is a highly varied and rewarding specialty. You are very busy during daytime hours seeing a great mix of clinical cases and life is never dull..... I thoroughly recommend it!!