Working life (GP)

This page provides useful information about the roles and responsibilities of GPs, where they work, who they work with and what they feel about their role.

How your time is spent

Most GPs spend a significant amount of time seeing patients in individual consultations, wherever they are based. The working week is divided up into sessions, each lasting half a day.

A full-time working week comprises eight sessions, which equates to four days. A typical day in the practice normally starts early, perhaps around 8am when the GP arrives at work to check paperwork before they start seeing patients. You will often then see patients until the late morning - seeing perhaps 18-20 patients or more. At the end of morning surgery most GPs see extra patients who need to be seen urgently that day.

?The joy of general practice is its infinite variety. You simply never know what you will be dealing with next" - Royal College of GPs

At the end of morning surgery GPs generally catch up on their paperwork, and make any necessary phone calls to patients, hospital doctors and other healthcare professionals. After lunch they may visit patients in their homes or care homes. Once home visits are complete, GPs will start their afternoon surgery, which might run from 3 pm until 5.30pm with booked appointments and last-minute urgent cases after that. Some surgeries now offer early morning and late evening clinics as well.

The number of patients looked after by a GP varies but the average is around 1,800.

Seeing patients for individual consultations is only one aspect of the work. The rest of the week is spent on administration, meetings, training, teaching and special interests, depending on the workload of the individual GP. GP partners generally have more administrative work and meetings than salaried GPs given their additional responsibilities.?

Working hours

The working hours of salaried and locum GPs is limited to 48 by the European Working Time Directive at present. GP partners are self employed, and this directive does not apply to them.

Most GPs working two sessions a day will start at around 8 am and finish around 6.30 pm or later. These hours can vary.

Some GPs work on Saturday mornings on a rota. There is also a move to require GPs to provide a service
seven days a week.

It’s really satisfying to be able to successfully treat patients in the community and in their own homes when possible? Catherine Brown is a trainee GP based in Lerwick, the Shetland Islands’ main town.

Read Catherine’s story [1]

- Who you will work with?

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GPs work alongside:

- GP colleagues
- practice nurses [2] and other healthcare professionals, e.g. phlebotomists [3]
- practice managers [4], medical secretaries [5] and administrative staff [6]

They also work closely with:

- other healthcare professionals attached to the practice such as midwives [7], community nurses [8], health visitors [9], physiotherapists [10], occupational therapists [11], speech therapists [12], mental health and other specialist nurses, dietitians [13], counsellors [14] and community pharmacists [15]
- hospital doctors and social workers [16]

- Attractions and challenges of the role

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GPs are attracted to the role for diverse reasons. They may enjoy:

- having autonomy in their work
- being able to undertake a variety of work with all age groups, types of disease and problems
- co-ordinating care and being independent advocates for patients
- providing holistic [17] care ? treating patients as people rather than as ?diseases? or ?cases?
- providing continuity of care ? building trusting relationships with patients and their families over a long period
- doing preventive and promotional health work alongside diagnosis and treatment
- being involved in their local communities

GPs may also be attracted by the pay and conditions. They can reach a relatively high income early in their career and it is one of the specialties most suited to part-time and flexible working. They also have good opportunities to live and work where they want.

The challenges of the role may include:

- the growing workload, especially dealing with complex psycho-social as well as medical problems within the standard ten-minute consultation
- not knowing what problems patients are going to present with in order to make an accurate assessment of their needs
- keeping up-to-date with the enormous range of diseases and service changes
- keeping on top of administrative tasks
- dealing with difficult patients and work colleagues
- not taking their own health seriously and suffering from stress and burn-out
- uncertainty about future models and funding of GP services

Source URL: https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/general-practice-gp/working-life

Links
[17] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Holistic