

General psychiatry

General psychiatrists manage and treat adults with mental health disorders.

Mental illness is increasingly common and each year approximately 25% of Britons experience a mental health problem.

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Note: this video is part of a longer film that can be watched from the [psychiatry introductory page](#) ^[3].

Life as a general psychiatrist

You'll need a detailed knowledge of anatomy, pharmacology, [physiology](#) ^[4] and psychiatry to succeed, as well as the ability to understand the social factors that influence a patient's mental health.

Common mental health disorders you'll treat include:

- mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder
- psychoses including schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder and bipolar disorder with psychotic symptoms
- eating disorders
- anxiety disorders and phobias
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- drug and alcohol abuse, including psychosis in association with substance use
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- organic disorders such as dementia
- personality disorders

Critical to the success of your role is the ability to form a collaborative therapeutic alliance with a patient. This will involve you working as part of a multidisciplinary team of professionals. You'll be expected to take the lead role in establishing the strategic management plan for a patient, using your therapeutic skills to involve the patient and develop a constructive pathway to recovery.

Your role will be varied and fascinating. You'll need to be highly competent in both pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches. The treatment you recommend will often combine use of medication and psychological and social interventions.

Most of your work will be delivered in a community setting but you'll also run hospital clinics and care for patients in hospital wards and specialist units.

How much can I earn?

You'll first earn a salary when you start your [foundation training](#) ^[5] after medical school. Find out details of current salary ranges for foundation and specialty training, [SAS doctors](#) ^[6] and consultants on the ['Pay for doctors'](#) ^[7] page.

How about the benefits?

- make a difference
- flexible and part-time working
- high income early in your career
- work anywhere in the world
- excellent pension scheme
- good holiday entitlement
- NHS discounts in shops and restaurants

Must-have skills

- excellent communication skills to manage a wide range of relationships with colleagues, and patients and their families
- emotional resilience, a calm temperament and the ability to work well under pressure
- teamwork and the capacity to lead multidisciplinary teams
- problem-solving and diagnostic skills
- outstanding organisational ability and effective decision-making skills
- first-class time and resource management for the benefit of patients

Entry requirements

Your first step is medical school. Typically, you'll need excellent GCSEs and three A or A* passes at A level including chemistry for a five-year undergraduate degree in medicine. Many medical schools also ask for biology and others may require maths or physics.

If you already have a degree, you could study for a four-year postgraduate degree in medicine.

You'll need to pass an interview and admissions test. You'll be asked to show how you demonstrate the NHS values such as compassion and respect.

Some medical schools look to recruit a mix of students from different backgrounds and geographical areas, so your educational and economic background and family circumstances could be considered as part of your application.

"The treatment I give is a mixture of medication and talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy ^[8] (CBT). Patients often say they find the opportunity to talk over their mental health issues with someone who listens non-judgementally is the thing that helps them the most."

[Read Grace's story](#) ^[9].

What are my chances of starting a career in general psychiatry?

There are approximately 2,724 general psychiatrists working in the NHS in England. In 2020, there were 174 applications for 155 specialty training places.

How to become a general psychiatrist

After medical school, you'll join the paid two-year foundation programme ^[10] where you'll work in six placements in different settings.

After your foundation programme, you can apply for paid specialty training ^[11] to become a general psychiatrist, which will take a minimum of six years.

You may be able to train part time, for example for health reasons or if you have family or caring responsibilities.

Where a career as a general psychiatrist can take you

There are three recognised sub-specialties within general adult psychiatry:

- liaison psychiatry
- rehabilitation psychiatry
- substance misuse psychiatry

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• Further information

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has further information about being a doctor in general psychiatry, particularly as your career progresses. Take a look.

See its [Choose psychiatry information](#) [12], including a guide to download, video, and range of careers information and blog posts.

Other roles that may interest you

- [General practitioner](#) [13]
- [Paediatrician](#) [14]
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- [Child and adolescent psychiatry](#) [16]

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