

## Working life (General psychiatry)

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

“The work of a psychiatrist is always engaging and challenging, sometimes moving, occasionally frustrating but often rewarding, sometimes when this is least expected. I would have no hesitation in recommending it as a career choice to anyone who is interested in people and the relationships between them.”

*(Consultant psychiatrist)*

“I enjoy the diversity offered by general psychiatry. It’s wonderful working with a variety of professionals, and treating a number of differing psychiatric illnesses using drug treatments as well as psychotherapies.” (Consultant psychiatrist)

### How your time is spent

A typical referral from a GP to a psychiatrist may take around an hour and a full psychiatric assessment involves a careful review of the person’s mental and physical health, and the person’s background, past physical and mental health and current social situation, and thoughts.

The psychiatrist will usually gather information from others including GPs and other professionals where this is available and will seek the opinion of relatives or carers with the patient’s permission. They will seek to establish a common understanding of the problems with the patient and others and integrate all the information obtained into a diagnostic formulation, including assessment of any risks.

This will then form the basis for an initial management plan which may include further investigations such as blood tests or scans and a decision about how and where any interventions will take place.

### [On call](#) <sup>[1]</sup> and working hours

The working hours in general psychiatry often follow a regular Monday-Friday daytime pattern. [On call](#) <sup>[1]</sup> work, especially at associate specialist or consultant level is generally less onerous than other medical and surgical specialties. Nearly all training posts involve out of hours working, either shift working or non-resident [on call](#) <sup>[1]</sup>. Consultants are usually the second or third person [on call](#) <sup>[1]</sup> only. The

regular work pattern enables an excellent work-life balance.

General psychiatrists may see in-patients in a hospital setting, or work within the community. Hospital work can include ward rounds for acute or long-term patients as well as outpatient clinics. New patients may have appointments lasting an hour, considerably longer than appointments given in other medical specialties. Follow-up appointments may last around 20 or 30 minutes.

Most consultant psychiatrists have around ten hours allocated each week for non-clinical activities including research and audit. Teaching is also part of this work, either at a local or regional/national level.

The EU [Working Time Directive](#) <sup>[2]</sup> limits the working week to 48 hours. It is also possible to work part-time once you are consultant, or to train on a less than full-time <sup>[3]</sup>basis (conditions apply).

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**Who you will  
work with?**

**Expand /  
collapse**

General psychiatrists work as part of large multidisciplinary teams within a hospital or clinic.

They work with:

- GPs
- mental health nurses
- occupational therapists
- pharmacists
- social workers
- clinical psychologists
- medical secretaries and administrative staff
- neurologists and other physicians
- clinical radiologists

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**Attractions and  
challenges of  
the role**

## Expand / collapse

General psychiatrists often find their work very rewarding as there is a real chance to improve patients' lives using modern therapeutic approaches. They often have longer appointment times than other medical specialists, and therefore spend more time with individual patients.

Psychiatrists frequently liaise with and learn from highly experienced colleagues in other medical fields such as general medicine, radiology or neurology and with non-medical colleagues including psychologists and social workers. This team-working is a very enjoyable part of the job. Psychiatrists also rely on the expertise and experience of mental health nurses. There is almost always someone to turn to for advice or discussion.

Working with patients who have complex mental health problems and difficult life circumstances can sometimes be very challenging. Psychiatrists need to be able to tolerate uncertainty and clinical risk. They also need to engage with people in meaningful ways at times of turmoil and distress and help their patients to regain a sense of hope and recovery.

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### Links

[1] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On\\_call](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On_call)

[2] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Working\\_Time\\_Directive](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Working_Time_Directive)

[3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/working-health/information-doctors/less-full-time-training-doctors>