Working life (MMV)

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

> "I became a microbiologist because I could relate basic science to findings in the clinical laboratory, and use this to determine what was happening to individual patients. Furthermore, I help ensure patients are effectively treated, which is immensely rewarding." (Consultant microbiologist)

A typical day might begin with a handover from the microbiology doctor, who has been on call [1] the previous night. Cases dealt with on call [1] may include new admissions with septic shock or meningitis, or patients on intensive care [2] (or haematology units) whose condition has deteriorated overnight.?

Laboratory staff will then provide the results of cultures of blood and sterile fluids that have become positive overnight. Urgent and important results are communicated directly to clinical colleagues through visits to the intensive care unit and other relevant wards or via telephone. Microbiologists provide advice regarding the interpretation of results and the appropriateness of further investigations and antibiotic treatment.

Intensive care units have high rates of antibiotic use, and members of the microbiology team usually visit these units on a daily basis. Microbiologists regularly attend multidisciplinary meetings with colleagues from specialties that also deal with large numbers of patients with infections, such as paediatrics and haematology.???

Telephone enquiries from hospital colleagues and GPs continue throughout the working day. Further significant results arising during the day are communicated with clinical staff if urgent, and advice regarding appropriate management is given. Microbiologists communicate daily with hospital-infection-control staff to minimise the risks of cross-infection between patients.???

Trainees are able to discuss the interpretation of results and subsequent appropriate advice on antibiotic use with their microbiology consultants during the day and via telephone when on call overnight.??

Multidisciplinary meetings are also a regular part of the working week, which are used for clinical discussions and to formulate antibiotic and infection control policies and emergency preparedness plans.?Laboratory management and outbreak investigation meetings are also part of the work.

Out-of-hours commitments are relatively light, and on-call is often undertaken from home.

This specialty is mainly based in the laboratory, but ward rounds, ITU units and outpatient clinics are also part of working life.

The EU Working Time Directive 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 [3] basis (conditions apply).

- Who you will work with?

  Expand / collapse

  Microbiologists and virologists work as part of large multidisciplinary teams.

  They work with:

  - biomedical scientists
  - clinical scientist
  - GPs and other doctors
  - infection control nurses
  - infectious diseases doctors
  - secretaries and administrative staff
- Attractions and challenges of the role

  Expand / collapse

  Enjoyable elements of the work include:

  - the fascinating, complex and ever-evolving interactions between the human host and the microbial agents of infection
  - the combination of cutting-edge laboratory science with clinical care for individual patients
  - most patients with infectious diseases make a rapid and complete recovery which makes the job very satisfying
  - the varied work environment, generated by the microbiologist?s ability to provide input across a broad range of specialties
  - opportunities to develop special interests in research, teaching, sub-specialties, antibiotic use or the infectious diseases problems affecting particular patient group
  - relatively light our-of-hours commitments, and good consultant support for trainees

  Challenging aspects of the work include:

  - the broad knowledge of issues relating to infectious diseases and microbiology can be challenging to obtain
  - the role of the medical microbiologist is evolving, with further specialisation and flexibility a likelihood
  - microorganisms are changing and new diseases emerging ? providing challenges to the medical microbiologist

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Links
[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On_call
[2] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Intensive_care
[3] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/working-health/information-doctors/less-full-time-training-doctors