

Working life (old age psychiatry)

This page provides useful information about the roles and responsibilities of old age psychiatrists, where they work, who they work with and how they feel about their role.

“I chose old age psychiatry because it enabled me to use my medical skills as well as my psychiatric training. I stayed in old age psychiatry because of the patients, who have great stories to tell about their lives, the diverse multi-professional teams I work with and the fascinating, complex clinical problems we tackle (and often solve) for our patients.” - **an old age psychiatrist.**

There is certainly no typical working day in old age psychiatry. The work also varies nationally according to the local NHS trust service model.

Old age psychiatrists working in a community mental health team often visit patients either in their own homes or residential nursing homes. They may also undertake outpatients' clinics. Consultants based in hospitals will attend regular ward rounds and may also have outpatient clinics.

Regular team meetings are an important part of the working week. Complex cases will be discussed in multidisciplinary team meetings. Consultants will normally provide advice to colleagues in these forums and at other times following discussion of the issues.

Teaching and training both medical students and psychiatry trainees is also a vital aspect of the work.

Many elderly people also have physical health problems and so there is often the opportunity to work closely with colleagues in hospital settings such as stroke [1], neurology, geriatric medicine and clinical radiology

Old age psychiatrists often work a 9-5 Monday to Friday pattern, although they may also be involved in an on call [2] rota. On calls are usually quiet in old age psychiatry.

The EU Working Time Directive [3] 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 basis [4].

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Who you will work with?

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Who old age psychiatrists work with?

Old age psychiatrists work as part of large multidisciplinary teams.

They work with:

- clinical psychologists
- mental health nurses sometimes known as community psychiatric nurses, or CPNs).
- occupational therapists
- other psychotherapists
- other mental health professionals
- social workers
- medical secretaries and administrative staff

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Attractions and challenges of the role

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Helping older people to deal with a wide range of problems and being able to make a difference is hugely rewarding. Older people are often ignored in society. The career can be perceived as unappealing or that it is difficult to make a difference. Old age psychiatrists are however passionate about helping older people to maintain their independence and mental health and find this very rewarding. As the population ages there is a growing understanding and acknowledgement of the needs of elderly people, and the ways in which services can rise to meet these needs. There is huge scope to improve the lives of older people and their families and carers in old age psychiatry.

It's an exciting and rewarding time to be working in old age psychiatry. Recent developments in neuroscience have enhanced our understanding of brain function and memory loss. Medications which can help to lessen or stabilise the symptoms of dementia are improving the lives of many elderly people.

Older patients sometimes suffer from multiple difficulties necessitating the collaborative working of a multidisciplinary team to meet their needs. The increase in people over the age of 65 anticipated in the next 20 years will create an increased demand for old age psychiatry services.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/psychiatry/old-age-psychiatry/working-life>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Stroke>

[2] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On_call

[3] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Working_Time_Directive

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