

Working life (occupational medicine)

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

I became an occupational physician because I was curious about the working lives of others, and wanted a role where I could meet and learn about different people outside of the clinic."
(occupational physician)

Although a typical day in occupational health practice can vary enormously according to the role and setting, the work will often involve:

- clinical work such as assessing individuals for capability, eligibility for ill-health retirement or other specific purpose
- health surveillance arising from the statutory duties to control risk at work
- assessing the workplace and work activities, and advising on control measures in liaison with other related specialists such as safety officers, occupational hygienists or ergonomists

There will almost always be a team to either manage or work with. In most organisations, occupational physicians work with others to formulate policy and procedure in line with relevant health and safety legislation.

Occupational physicians usually work normal office hours. However, as with any senior management role the job can be demanding and require considerable commitment, often with travel. On-call commitment is usually minimal.

Occupational physicians are often based in a workplace or sometimes in a local centre which individuals attend for assessment. Occasionally patients may be seen in their own homes.

The EU Working Time Directive [1] 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 [2]basis (conditions apply).

- Who you will work with?

Expand / collapse

Occupational health physicians can work independently, but may also work as part of large multidisciplinary teams.

They work with:

- occupational health nurses
- psychologists

- ergonomists
- occupational hygienists
- health and safety practitioners
- public health specialists
- secretaries and administrative staff
- Attractions and challenges of the role

Expand / collapse

Enjoyable elements of the job include:

- the variety of jobs, as roles differ with health risks according to industry sector
- the ability to move around within the specialty for career development
- the opportunity to spend time with the workforce to understand the features and risks of their jobs
- working with non-medical managers as a technical expert within an organisation
- a good work life balance usually with no on-call or emergency work
- the opportunity to gain leadership and management skills early in training
- communicating with people at all levels from clinic to chief executive/ boardroom ? including patients and senior managers

Remaining independent in opinion and avoiding being partial to either workforce or management is a more challenging aspect of occupational medicine.

The fact that half of occupational medicine training posts are outside the NHS is a distinctive feature of this specialty and indicative of the variety of roles available.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/occupational-medicine/working-life>

Links

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

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