

Working life (tropical medicine)

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.

?Tropical medicine is easily the most fascinating branch of medicine ? most of the patients have treatable conditions, and you never know what you are going to see next, whether based in the UK or while working overseas. It provides an opportunity to combine clinical medicine and public health, and the opportunities for applied and basic research are endless. ?Like many people I chose it because of an interest in biology at school, plus an appetite for travel that started in childhood.??(from a consultant in tropical medicine)?



If working in a hospital, the tropical medicine doctor will usually participate in ward rounds and outpatient clinics. Ward rounds are consultant-led. Some tropical medicine doctors run specialist travel clinics, advising the public (either in person or over the phone) on how not to catch infections such as malaria while travelling. They also provide advice to other doctors.

Tropical medicine doctors work in a regional infectious diseases unit or a specialist tropical diseases hospital

and around 80% are involved in research.?

On-call commitments are usually one in three or four to include nights and weekends if working in a hospital. Because the specialty is so small the on-call might be as busy as one in two.

Research is a vital aspect of tropical medicine and most doctors spend part of their working week conducting research. This involves laboratory work, reviewing scientific literature, writing grant applications, reports and academic papers, as well as attending conferences and meetings. Tropical medicine doctors often spend part of their working week teaching, perhaps in a specialist school of tropical medicine.

Multidisciplinary meetings are also a regular part of the working week, which are used for clinical discussions and to formulate policies and plans. Tropical medicine doctors may also attend meetings with other organisations and public health professionals.

Some tropical medicine specialists spend time working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) doing relief work. This is good experience early in training but those who want to make a career out of working with such organisations will want to obtain a very general medical training, eg general practice training and perhaps formal public health training. Specialist training in public health may also be more appropriate for long-term posts in organisations such as the World Health Organisation.

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 [1]basis (conditions apply).

- Who you will work with?

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Tropical medicine doctors work as part of large multidisciplinary teams.

They work with:

- medical microbiologists and virologists
 - GPs and other doctors
 - dietitians
 - pharmacists
 - infection control nurses
 - other specialist nurses (eg HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis)
 - travel health nurses
 - infectious disease doctors
 - specialists in entomology (insects) and parasitology
 - members of non-governmental organisations
 - public health professionals
 - radiologists
 - secretaries and administrative staff
- Attractions and challenges of the role

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Tropical medicine is an exciting specialty and it provides excellent opportunities for research and to work overseas. The work provides the opportunity to help combat the problems of healthcare acquired infection and worldwide pandemics. Responding to infection problems, whether emergency or routine is rewarding and purposeful. The range of patients and illnesses seen is very diverse.

Colleagues are always interesting and fun to work with and the opportunities to teach international and

home students in UK-based teaching centres are excellent.

One of the challenges facing tropical medicine doctors is the increasing resistance of pathogens to antibiotics and of vectors to insecticides. Research into this area is particularly important.

Another challenge is dealing with patients that may need isolating, for example in the case of Ebola or SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory [2] Syndrome). Special isolating equipment and personal protective equipment are used. Language can sometimes be a barrier, particularly if working overseas, and this is another challenge of the job, meaning that consultation times can sometimes be longer.

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

Links

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

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Respiratory>