Clinical academic medicine

Clinical academics are qualified doctors who combine working as a specialist doctor with research and teaching responsibilities.

There is usually a 50/50 split between the two roles, meaning you will spend half the week practising as a doctor and the other half carrying out research and lecturing. If you are interested in practising as a doctor whilst also making a difference to the future of medical science and education then a career in academic medicine may be for you.

Clinical academics exist in all medical specialties from anaesthetics to epidemiology, and from surgery to public health. They make a vital contribution at every research stage - from early biomedical research understanding disease pathways, through to drug development and personalised medicine.

There’s never been a better time to become involved in medical research. The research is wide-ranging and can impact on many areas of health including treatments for cancer, fertility and heart disease to name but a few. New exciting developments include:

- pharmacogenetics - how our genes can affect our response to medicine
- bioengineering – using the latest technologies to advance medicine and improve health in diverse fields that include artificial organs and limbs

Clinical academic medicine is a very competitive field. Clinical academics comprise around 5% of the medical consultant workforce. So you’ll need to be an academic high achiever with a good record of success at medical school. You also need to be passionate about your chosen area and driven to push boundaries and make new discoveries in your field.

The proportion of women working in clinical academic medicine is increasing and currently stands at 28% (Medical Schools Council Clinical Academic Survey, 2014).

If you haven’t applied for medical school yet then you might consider applying to one of the medical schools that offers a PhD alongside the medical degree and leads to an MB PhD. Having a PhD this early in your career will greatly enhance your career prospects in academic medicine. However, most people undertake their PhD later on in their career.

If you want to be a clinical academic you’re going to need a higher degree at some point. This means achieving a minimum of a master’s degree and almost always a PhD before you reach...
consultant level. These higher qualifications can sometimes be obtained during your first degree in medicine, or completed later in your training.

Clinical academic medicine is no different to any field of research in that you need as much published research as possible, along with previous research and ideally teaching experience. The earlier you can get this experience the better.

However, it is not essential to gain experience of research during your time at medical school. Not all successful applicants for academic foundation posts have previous research experience, and some people develop this interest later on.

Want to learn more?

Find out about:

- the academic foundation programme [2]
- academic clinical fellowships [3]
- clinical lectureships [4]
- senior academic posts [5]
- NIHR in-practice fellowships [6]
- Securing funding [7]

The integrated academic pathway offers a structured route into academic medicine. It comprises the following stages:

- medical school

- academic foundation programme

- academic clinical fellowship

- clinical lectureship
senior academic post

This is a flexible pathway and people often join at different stages of their medical career.

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Finding work

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The National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) runs Academic Clinical Fellowship and Academic Clinical Lectureship schemes, and many charities and funding bodies within the UK also provide additional personal fellowship schemes.

NIHR funds dedicated Integrated Academic Training posts which are managed through university, NHS trusts and HEE local office/deanery partnerships.

Entry to the Integrated Academic Training is via competitive recruitment, which is now coordinated by the NIHR [8].

It is possible to pursue research throughout your specialist training and you don’t always have to be on a (NIHR) funded Academic Clinical Fellowship to undertake a period of research.

Professional bodies, including the Royal Colleges and the Academy of Medical Sciences [9] all provide careers support and advice for clinical academics.

Doctors who have completed their foundation programme or who are part way through their specialty training could enter at the NIHR Academic Clinical Fellowship level. Those already in possession of a PhD/MD are more likely to be eligible for NIHR Clinical Lecturer posts.

Source URL: https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/career-opportunities-doctors/clinical-academic-medicine

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