

"I love my job and particularly enjoy the hands-on aspect of ultrasound scanning."

Dr Jackie Hughes is a consultant radiologist at Addenbrooke's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in Cambridge. She specialises in paediatric radiology.

Dr Jackie Hughes

Consultant Radiologist

Employer or university

Addenbrooke's Hospital

Portrait of Dr Jackie Hughes

How I got into the role

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When I was at school I was initially attracted to veterinary science, but after a work experience placement in a local vet's surgery I decided I'd rather work with patients I could talk to!

During the sixth form I worked as a volunteer at a local hospital making beds and generally helping out, and also gained experience working with children with Down's syndrome. Having decided medicine was for me, I went to King's College London for my undergraduate degree.

Having achieved a distinction during the first part of my medical degree I was offered the opportunity to complete an intercalated degree at University College London and I chose psychology as, at the time, I wanted to become a psychiatrist. The degree is condensed into one year, which was quite intense. After this I continued with my medical training.

I graduated before the introduction of foundation training ^[1].. My first posts after medical school were at King's College Hospital in hepatic medicine and surgery.

My first senior house officer (SHO) post was at Guy's Hospital working in A&E. After that I moved to Charing Cross Hospital where I spent three years on a SHO medical rotation. This provided varied experience in a range of specialties in renal, cardiac, geriatric, rheumatology, oncology ^[2] and respiratory ^[3] medicine.

It was during a registrar post at Charing Cross Hospital in respiratory ^[3] medicine that I became really interested in diagnostic imaging which I found to be intellectually stimulating. I decided to apply for a training programme in radiology.

During my training programme at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals I developed my sub-specialty in paediatric radiology. By now I'd started to have my own family and I was naturally drawn to working with children. Working in paediatric radiology is interesting as the work is non-organ specific and involves the whole body.

I chose to do some of my radiology training on a part-time basis to give me time to spend with my children and to fit in study for the exams of the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR). I also undertook fellowship training in paediatric radiology at Great Ormond Street Hospital.

It took me nearly eight years from the start of my specialist training to become a consultant. After achieving my CCT ^[4] I became a locum consultant both at St George's Hospital and Lewisham Hospital before obtaining a consultant post at Guy's Hospital. This was followed by a move to the Evelina London Children's Hospital on the St Thomas' site when it opened in 2004.

What I do

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As Consultant paediatric radiologist at Addenbrooke's Hospital I see children of all ages from newborns to the age of 16. The children's services department at Addenbrooke's is a regional service for many specialties, including oncology ^[2] and neonatology, and is the local paediatric centre for the population of Cambridge and surrounding areas.

We admit approximately 3,500 patients a year and offer a wide range of experience in both children's medicine and surgery. There is also a large neonatology unit on site based at the Rosie Hospital.

I work three days a week, and have a series of half-day sessions in different radiology modalities (imaging techniques) including plain x ray, fluoroscopy (where real-time x-ray images are used to show the internal structures of the body), ultrasound ^[5], CT and MRI ^[6]. The imaging findings are reported by voice dictation and sent to the referring clinicians

who relay the results to the patients. During ultrasound [5] and fluoroscopy clinics, where there is direct patient contact, I discuss the results directly with the parents.

Radiology departmental referrals may come from GPs, outpatients' clinics and from hospital wards. We also see emergency cases from A&E.

Radiologists have a vital role to play in diagnosis. I meet with other clinicians in multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings several times a week to discuss imaging findings and the management of patients. Radiologists often make the initial diagnosis, after which the treatment is carried out by the referring clinician.

As well as being a member of the Royal College of Radiology, I'm also a member of the British Society of Paediatric Radiologists and European Society of Paediatric Radiology. Attending conferences both in the UK and in Europe is an interesting part of my job.

I'm a clinical supervisor and participate in teaching and training radiology specialist trainees as well as examining final year medical students. I'm also involved in lecturing at both regional and national levels. Another aspect of my job involves sometimes overseeing research and audits that junior doctors in our team are conducting

The best bits and challenges

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I love my job and particularly enjoy the hands-on aspect of ultrasound [5] scanning. I enjoy being with children and also like working with their parents. Radiology is a very intellectually stimulating specialty where you work closely with a wide range of medical and surgical colleagues to discuss cases and solve problems. Radiology is an exciting specialty to be a part of, as the technology is constantly developing.

Fitting in the study needed to pass the examinations to achieve fellowship of the Royal College of Radiologists (FRCR) during my specialist training was definitely a challenge. The exams are difficult and you have to fit in your study around your job and in my case my family life. This is why I initially chose to work part-time.

Another challenge in my job is seeing patients who are referred to me with complex conditions, such as children with cancers or more unusual surgical or gastrointestinal cases. Working with children with cancer can be emotionally demanding. Scans are sometimes undertaken to see if a cancerous tumour has returned, which is an anxious time for parents and medical staff. During these difficult times I rely all the more on the support of my hospital colleagues.

Life outside work

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I'm mother to six children, and I find that working three days a week offers me the perfect work life balance. I have a really interesting job and I also have time to devote to my children. Keeping fit is also important to me, and I do this by cycling to work every day and running.

Career plans and top tips for others

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I plan to continue in my current role which is always expanding and developing. Cambridge has a growing population and this means our work will also grow. I've recently also decided to become a pastoral care advisor to medical students at the University of Cambridge to hopefully support young medics through the process I have gone through myself.

Top tips

- ensure you keep up-to-date with the latest radiological techniques as technologies are constantly evolving
- contact your radiology department's clinical director to find out more about the specialty – this is particularly relevant for foundation trainees and beyond
- the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) can also provide more information

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Links

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

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Oncology> [3]

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Respiratory> [4]

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#CCT> [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Ultrasound>

[6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#MRI>