

"What's lovely about working in the community is the breadth and diversity of the job."

Dr Bailey was hooked on old age psychiatry when he had to refer an elderly patient for a psychiatric assessment as a junior doctor. Find out more.

Dr Alex Bailey

Consultant in old age psychiatry

Employer or university

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How I got into the role

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I enjoyed my psychiatry placement while I was at medical school, but it was with younger people with drug and alcohol problems which didn't really float my boat.

I was planning a career in hospital medicine, most likely geriatrics. But I was sold on old age psychiatry as a specialty when I was asked to refer an elderly gentleman to a psychiatrist to assess his mood. I remember spending ages reading up and writing the referral because I didn't know what information the psychiatrist would need. She was grateful for the detail I provided and was so patient and skilful with the patient. I knew then that old age psychiatry was for me.

The psychiatrist in question was an inspiration to me and remains my mentor today. I fell in love with everything about psychiatry from day one – the patients, the way the team works together and the liaison with other services.

What I do

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There is absolutely no typical day. I'm a full time clinical consultant and lead the team, advising them in different scenarios. The work is very varied. For example, on any given day I may have to chair a complex family meeting, see someone in the community with severe psychotic symptoms and assess someone with dementia in a care home who is presenting with behavioural difficulties.

As well as that, I'm a training programme director for newly-qualified doctors on psychiatry placements so I have responsibility for overseeing their training. And I chair the training committee for the old age faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, trying to get more doctors in training into this fabulous speciality.

The best bits and challenges

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What's lovely about working in the community is the breadth and diversity of the job. You also get to work with a large number of different professionals, both in the team and in other services.

In this job I have to be psychiatrist, medic, pharmacologist, psychologist and social worker. Old age psychiatry is about complexity, seeing your patients 'in the round' and understanding them intimately. What's not to love?

Clinically leading the team is a privilege but is definitely on the stressful side!

Life outside work

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Outside work, I cook – loads! People de-stress in different ways but, for me, it's about getting home and spending a couple of hours in the kitchen. It's very easy to get

overwhelmed as an NHS consultant and I think it's critical to be able to leave work behind. Knowing I've got solid systems and a fabulous team in place allows me to be confident that the service is in good hands.

Career plans and top tips for others

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If you're thinking about choosing old age psychiatry, do it! It's extremely hard work, but so rewarding. Personally I found adult general psychiatry more taxing and often I didn't feel as though I was making much of a difference. But it's very seldom I feel like that in this job.

This is the job for you if you're nosey, caring and a team player.

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