

Medical ophthalmology

Medical ophthalmologists (also known as ophthalmic physicians) are doctors who diagnose and treat medical eye conditions, many of which are related to diseases such as diabetes.

You'll need to combine expertise in both general medicine and ophthalmology.

Doctor examining patient

Life as a medical ophthalmologist

The role differs from ophthalmic surgeons who specialise in the surgical and medical treatment of eye diseases and injuries.

Many diseases can affect a person's eyes, for example bowel disease, diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. In fact, ocular inflammatory disorders are often the first sign that a person has a disease.

As a consequence, you'll need to investigate a patient's whole body and record a thorough history. This additional complexity adds a level of interest and intrigue to the role of a medical ophthalmologist.

Treatments are at the forefront of medicine and increasingly involve the use of technology, for example imaging and laser usage is very progressive.

You'll see patients with a wide range of conditions including:

- inflammatory/infectious disorders affecting vision, for example uveitis, scleritis, corneal graft rejection, systemic vasculitis, thyroid eye disease
- neurological disorders affecting vision, for example multiple sclerosis, brain tumour, stroke [1], pituitary disorders, thyroid eye disease,
- raised eye pressure, for example glaucoma
- retina specific disorders affecting vision, for example age-related macular degeneration
- vascular disorders affecting vision, for example diabetes, diabetic retinopathy,
- genetic disorders affecting vision, for example retinitis pigmentosa

Common procedure and interventions include:

- clinical examinations
- prescription of drug treatments, including immunosuppressive therapies

- laser therapy
- intra-ocular injections for the treatment of uveitis (inflammation of the middle layer of the eye) and retinal disorders
- diagnostics taps
- botulinum injections for facial dystonia (involuntary muscle contractions)

The UK's ageing population and the prevalence of diabetes means common eye conditions such as age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy are more widespread, which is increasing the demand for medical ophthalmologists.

How much can I earn?

You'll first earn a salary when you start your [foundation training](#) ^[2] after medical school. Find out details of current salary ranges for foundation and specialty training, [SAS doctors](#) ^[3] and consultants on the [Pay for doctors](#) ^[4] page.

How about the benefits?

- make a difference
- flexible and part-time working
- high income early in your career
- work anywhere in the world
- excellent pension scheme
- good holiday entitlement
- NHS discounts in shops and restaurants

Must-have skills

- excellent communication skills to manage a wide range of relationships with colleagues, and patients and their families
- emotional resilience, a calm temperament and the ability to work well under pressure
- teamwork and the capacity to lead multidisciplinary teams
- problem-solving and diagnostic skills
- outstanding organisational ability and effective decision-making skills
- first-class time and resource management for the benefit of patients

Entry requirements

Your first step is medical school. Typically, you'll need excellent GCSEs and three A or A* passes at A level including chemistry for a five-year undergraduate degree in medicine. Many medical schools also ask for biology and others may require maths or physics.

If you already have a degree, you could study for a four-year postgraduate degree in medicine.

You'll need to pass an interview and admissions test. You'll be asked to show how you demonstrate the NHS values such as compassion and respect.

Some medical schools look to recruit a mix of students from different backgrounds and geographical areas, so your educational and economic background and family circumstances could be considered as part of your application.

"Medical ophthalmology has a good balance between general medicine and being a specialist in eye disease. It is a fascinating specialty as many diseases affect the eye - diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and bowel disease."

[Read Richard's story](#) ^[5].

What are my chances of starting a career in medical ophthalmology?

In 2021, there were two consultants in medical ophthalmology working in the NHS in England. There is considerable growth of the specialty while opportunities exist for research and teaching. In 2021, there were 21 applications for four training places.

How to become a medical ophthalmologist

After medical school, you'll join the paid two-year foundation programme ^[6] where you'll work in six placements in different settings.

After your foundation programme, you can apply for paid specialty training ^[7] to become a medical ophthalmologist, which will take a minimum of seven years.

You may be able to train part time, for example for health reasons or if you have family or caring responsibilities.

Where a career as a medical ophthalmologist can take you

You could:

- specialise or conduct research
- teach medical students or postgraduate students in training
- get involved in research at universities, the NHS or private sector

• [Live vacancies](#)

Find a vacancy

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- **Consultant - Ophthalmology - Medical Retina and Diabetic**

Truro, TR1 3LJ

Salary:

£105504.00 to £139882.00

Type:

Permanent

Employer:

Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Consultant - Ophthalmology - Medical Retina and Diabetic job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[8]

- **Bank Medical Locum Doctor FY2 - ST3+**

London, NW3 2QG

Salary:

£30.00

Type:

Bank

Employer:

Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Bank Medical Locum Doctor FY2 - ST3+ job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[9]

- **Consultant in Ophthalmology with a Special Interest in Medical Retina**

Doncaster, DN2 5LT

Salary:

£105504.00 to £139882.00

Type:

Permanent

Employer:

Doncaster & Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS FT

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Consultant in Ophthalmology with a Special Interest in Medical Retina job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[10]

- **Head of Medical Workforce and Medical Education**

Reading, RG30 4EJ

Salary:

£74290.00 to £85601.00

Type:

Permanent

Employer:

Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Head of Medical Workforce and Medical Education job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[11]

- **Medical Director**

Nantgarw, CF15 7QQ

Salary:

£155963.00 to £167079.00

Type:

Permanent

Employer:

Health Education and Improvement Wales

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Medical Director job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[12]

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- **Medical Administrator**

Rickmansworth, WD3 3HD

Rickmansworth, WD3 3LG

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Permanent

Employer:

New Road Surgery

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Medical Administrator job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[13]

- **Medical Examiner**

South Shields, NE34 0PL

Salary:

£105504.00 to £139882.00

Type:

Fixed-Term

Employer:

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Medical Examiner job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[14]

• Further information

These organisations have further information about being a doctor in medical ophthalmology, particularly as your career progresses. Take a look.

[Royal College of Physicians](#) ^[15]

[Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh](#) ^[16]

[Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow](#) ^[17]

[Medical Ophthalmological Society](#) ^[18]

[The Royal College of Ophthalmologists](#) ^[19]

Other roles that may interest you

- [Ophthalmology](#) ^[20]
- [Neurologist](#) ^[21]
- [Endocrinology and diabetes](#) ^[22]
- [Infectious diseases](#) ^[23]

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/medicine/medical-ophthalmology>

Links

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

https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation_training [3]

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/career-opportunities-doctors/sas-doctors> [4]

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/pay-doctors> [5]

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/medicine/medical-ophthalmology/real-life-story-dr-richard-gale> [6] <https://foundationprogramme.nhs.uk/> [7]

<https://specialtytraining.hee.nhs.uk/> [8] <https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/C9156-25-0232> [9]

<https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/C9391-25-0849> [10]

<https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/C9272-25-0263> [11]

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<https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/M9082-25-0061> [13]

<https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/A3494-25-0001> [14]

<https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/C9155-CRMD-0425-50> [15] <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/> [16]
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