

# Medical oncology

Medical oncologists are doctors who diagnose, assess, treat and manage patients with cancers (malignant tumours) and conduct translational research (ie research that has practical applications).

This page provides useful information on the nature of the work, the common procedures/interventions, sub-specialties and other roles that may interest you.



## Nature of the work

Medical oncologists aim to provide the best possible outcome for cancer patients, whether that is cure, or palliation and prolongation of good quality life. They also provide counselling for patients and their families. Clinical research is an important feature of their role. Clinical care, clinical trials, laboratory and translational cancer research form an integral part of the training. They are trained to work as part of a multidisciplinary team, able to advise on all aspects of treatment including surgery and radiotherapy [1] as well as having the skills to administer systemic therapies.

Their work role includes:

- diagnosing cancers

- discussing treatment options with patients
- arranging and supervising drug treatment and therapies including the management of any complications that may arise
- supporting patients and overseeing their care, including their lives after treatment

Medical oncologists treat patients who have localised or metastatic malignancy in need of systemic therapy. They also treat patients whose cancer has potentially been cured by surgery but for whom further therapy improves their outlook.

Medical and clinical oncologists often work in partnership together, and clinical oncology [2] covers both the therapeutic administration of ionising radiation (radiotherapy [1]) and cytotoxic chemotherapy [3]. However, only clinical oncologists administer radiotherapy [1].

Medical oncologists treat conditions such as:

- colorectal [4] cancer
- breast cancer
- lung cancer
- upper gastrointestinal (GI) cancer
- ovarian cancer
- tumours of the kidney (urological cancers)
- leukaemia
- melanoma

## Common procedures/interventions

These include:

- chemotherapy [3]
- endocrine therapy
- biological therapies such as antibodies, small molecules and immunotherapy

## Sub-specialties

There is no CCT [5] sub-specialty for medical oncology [2].

Many medical oncologists develop sub-specialty interests in different types of cancers such as:

- gastrointestinal tract cancers
- urological cancers
- cancers of the blood and lymphatic system
- cancers of the female reproductive system

Some medical oncologists develop interests in:

- paediatric oncology [2] (diagnosis and treatment of cancer in children)
- palliative care (for patients whose illness cannot be cure)
- the study and application of imaging technologies, such ultrasound [6], computed tomography (CT) Computed Axial Tomography, nuclear medicine, Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) [7] to diagnose or treat cancers

# Want to learn more?

Find out more about:

- the working life [8] of someone in medical oncology [2]
- the entry requirements [9] and training and development [10]

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Pay and conditions

This section provides useful information about the pay for junior doctors (doctors in training), specialty doctors, consultants and general practitioners.

Find out more about the current pay scales for doctors [11], and there's more information on the BMA website [12].

NHS Employers [13] provides useful advice and guidance on all NHS pay, contracts terms and conditions.

Medical staff working in private sector hospitals, the armed services or abroad will be paid on different scales.

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Where the role can lead

Read about consultant and non-consultant roles in medical oncology [2], flexible working and about wider opportunities.

## Consultant roles

You can apply for consultant roles six months prior to achieving your Certificate of Completion of Training [14] (CCT [5]). You will receive your CCT [5] at the end of medical oncology [2].

Managerial opportunities for consultants include:

- clinical lead - lead NHS consultant for the team
- clinical director - lead NHS consultant for the department
- medical director - lead NHS consultant for the Trust

Most NHS consultants will be involved with clinical and educational supervision of junior doctors.

Here are some examples of education and training opportunities:

- director of medical education - the NHS consultant appointed to the hospital board who is responsible for the postgraduate medical training in a hospital. They work with the postgraduate dean to make sure training meets GMC standards.
- training programme director - the NHS consultant overseeing the education of the local cohort of trainee doctors eg foundation training [15] programme director. This role will be working within the HEE local office/deanery
- associate dean - the NHS consultant responsible for management of the entirety of a training

programme. This role will be also be working within the HEE local office/deanery

### **SAS doctor roles**

There are also opportunities to work at non-consultant level, for example as a SAS (Specialist and Associate Specialist) doctor. SAS doctors are non-training roles where the doctor has at least four years of postgraduate training, two of those being in a relevant specialty. Find out more about SAS doctor roles [16].

### **Other non-training grade roles**

These roles include:

- trust grade
- clinical fellows

### **Academic pathways**

If you have trained on an academic medical oncology [2] pathway or are interested in research there are opportunities in academic medicine.

For those with a particular interest in research, you may wish to consider an academic career in medical oncology [2]. Whilst not essential, some doctors start their career with an Academic Foundation post. This enables them to develop skills in research and teaching alongside the basic competences in the foundation curriculum.

Entry into an academic career would usually start with an Academic Clinical Fellowship (ACF) and may progress to a Clinical Lectureship (CL). Alternatively some trainees that begin with an ACF post then continue as an ST trainee on the clinical programme post-ST4.

Applications for entry into Academic Clinical Fellow posts are coordinated by the National Institute for Health Research Trainees Coordinating Centre (NIHRTCC). [17]

There are also numerous opportunities for trainees to undertake research outside of the ACF/CL route, as part of planned time out of their training programme. Find out more about academic medicine [18].

The Clinical Research Network [19] (CRN) actively encourages all doctors to take part in clinical research.

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Job market and vacancies

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This section provides useful information about the availability of jobs, finding vacancies and where to find out more.

### **Job market information**

NHS Digital regularly publish workforce statistics which show the number of full time equivalent consultants and doctors in training for each specialty: NHS Digital workforce statistics [20].

Competition ratios for medical specialty training places are published on Health Education England's specialty training webpage [21].

**On this section we have information for England only.** For information regarding Scotland, Wales

and Northern Ireland please click on the links below.

NHS Scotland medical and dental workforce data [22]

NHS Wales medical and dental workforce data [23]

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety workforce information for Northern Ireland [24]

### Where to look for vacancies

All trainees apply through the online application system Oriel [25]. You will be able to register for training, view all vacancies, apply, book interviews and assessment centres, and manage offers made to you.

All jobs will be advertised on the NHS Jobs website. [26]

The BMJ Careers website [27]also advertises vacancies.

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Further information

### Organisations

Royal College of Physicians (Joint Collegiate Council for Oncology) [28]

Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh [29]

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow [30]

Association of Cancer Physicians [31]

### Real-life stories

Cancer therapeutics: medical oncology with clinical pharmacology (BMJ) [32]

## Other roles that may interest you

- Palliative medicine [33]
- Gastroenterology [34]
- General practice (GP) [35]
- Experienced paramedic [36]

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

### Links

- [1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Radiotherapy>
- [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Oncology>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Chemotherapy>
- [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Colorectal>
- [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#CCT>

- [6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Ultrasound>
- [7] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Magnetic\\_resonance\\_imaging\\_MRI](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Magnetic_resonance_imaging_MRI)
- [8] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/medicine/medical-oncology/working-life>
- [9] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/medicine/medical-oncology/entry-requirements-skills-and-interests>
- [10] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/medicine/medical-oncology/training-and-development>
- [11] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about-us/careers-medicine/pay-doctors>
- [12] <http://bma.org.uk/practical-support-at-work/pay-fees-allowances/pay-scales>
- [13] <http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/pay-and-reward>
- [14] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Certificate\\_of\\_completion\\_of\\_training](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Certificate_of_completion_of_training)
- [15] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation\\_training](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation_training)
- [16] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/currently-working-health/information-doctors/sas-doctors>
- [17] <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/>
- [18] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/currently-working-health/clinical-academic-careers/clinical-academic-medicine>
- [19] <http://www.crn.nihr.ac.uk/>
- [20] <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics>
- [21] <https://specialtytraining.hee.nhs.uk/Competition-Ratios>
- [22] <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Workforce/Medical-and-Dental/>
- [23] <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Staff/Medical-and-Dental-Staff>
- [24] <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/staff-numbers>
- [25] <https://www.oriel.nhs.uk/>
- [26] <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>
- [27] <http://careers.bmj.com>
- [28] <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/>
- [29] <http://www.rcpe.ac.uk/>
- [30] <http://www.rcpsg.ac.uk>
- [31] <http://www.cancerphysicians.org.uk/>
- [32] <http://careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/view-article.html?id=1460>
- [33] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/medicine/palliative-medicine>
- [34] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/medicine/gastroenterology>
- [35] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/general-practice-gp>
- [36] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/ambulance-service-team/roles-ambulance-service/experienced-paramedic>