

Working life (neurosurgery)

This page provides useful information on the working week as well as any on call [1] and other commitments, along with information on who you will work with. The attractions and challenges of the job are also in this section.

Neurosurgery is a particularly challenging surgical specialty. Our understanding of the brain and central nervous system is constantly changing and you'll need to keep up to date with the very latest developments and research.

Your working day is going to be long ? with early starts and late finishes all part of the job. Although surgery is your main responsibility, you will also be evaluating patients in outpatients? clinics and emergency departments and attending ward rounds.

Even as a consultant you will have a high level of on call duties during evenings, nights and weekends. That?s the nature of neurosurgery ? about half your work could be dealing with emergencies. You may perform several procedures a day ? which can range from the straightforward to long and highly complex and long operations. Elective surgeries are sometimes cancelled due to emergencies so you'll need to be very flexible.

Neurosurgeons work closely with other colleagues as part of a team and other hospital departments will also call upon your expertise.

Monitoring patients post-operatively is very important as complications can occur. For example following brain surgery patients may occasionally suffer blood clots or bleeding in the brain, seizures, stroke, coma or brain swelling.

You'll also be dealing with your patients? families to provide guidance and reassurance before and after surgery. This can at times be very emotionally demanding, particularly when things don?t go as planned.

Added to all this is your share of administrative work ? including:

- writing letters to GPs and patients
- other paperwork
- attending departmental and multidisciplinary meetings
- undertaking research.

Neurosurgeons are usually based in large regional centres usually attached to teaching hospitals. Most of these are in or near major cities. There are 34 neurosurgical units in the UK.

The EU Working Time Directive limits the working week to 48 hours. It is also possible to work part-time once you are consultant, or to train on a less than full-time basis (conditions apply).

- Who you will work with?

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Neurosurgeons work as part of a large multidisciplinary team.

Within the operating theatre you will work with:

- other surgeons [2]
- anaesthetists [3]
- theatre nurses [4]
- medical students
- doctors in training
- operating department practitioners [5]

Outside theatre you will also work with a wide range of people including:

- patients and their families
- radiotherapy staff [6]
- nurses [7]
- medical secretaries [8] and administrative staff [9]
- other doctors and surgeons including neurologists [10], oncologists [11], and neuroradiologists [12]

Neurosurgeons work particularly closely with neurologists. It is the neurologist that often provides the treatment and management plan for the patient, whilst the neurosurgeon provides the surgical expertise and intervention.

Once you are a consultant surgeon you will be leading and managing your team.

- Attractions and challenges of the role

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Neurosurgery is one of the most intricate and complex forms of surgery. Unlike some other parts of the body, damaged nerve tissue does not readily repair itself. This is a very demanding job where decisions must be made under pressure.

Our understanding of the brain and central nervous system is constantly changing and of course you'll need to keep up to date with the very latest developments.

Neurosurgery can sometimes be risky ? many operations are successful and life-enhancing but occasionally the outcome isn't always as positive. Your patients often come into hospital acutely unwell and it isn't always possible to treat them successfully.

You'll also be dealing with your patients' families to provide guidance and reassurance before and after surgery. This can at times be very emotionally demanding, particularly when things don't go as planned. But the job is also very rewarding when treatment does go well or perhaps even better than you had expected.

Neurosurgery is therefore a very challenging surgical specialty, but one that is also extremely rewarding and interesting.

In the past neurosurgery has been very male-dominated, but this is beginning to change.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/surgery/neurosurgery/working-life>

Links

- [1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On_call
- [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/surgery>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/anaesthesia>
- [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/theatre-nurse>
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