Career Planning

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Getting Started

Career exploration – getting started

Some doctors know their specialty before they've even started university. For the vast majority, however, choosing a particular field requires a far more complex decision making process. Deciding on which area you want your medical career to focus should involve a considerable amount of research. You might be attracted to some aspects of a specialty, but find aspects like working hours or the types of patients you are likely to encounter less appealing.

The choice of your specialty is a decision which is going to affect the rest of your career, so thorough research is critical. Don't rely on preconceptions. Before opting for a particular area you should have a considerable knowledge not just of the specialty, but the environment in which you'll be working and the patients you'll be treating.

So which areas should you be focusing on?

The nature of the work

- What systems, diseases and patients will you predominantly be working with?
- Is there a lot of variety in the work, or does it tend to focus on very singular specialised problems?
- What are your shift patterns likely to be, and how often will you be working out of hours?
- Are there particular ethical issues you will be dealing with?

Who you'll be working with

- Will you be regularly working with consultants, GPs, allied health professionals or other members of the clinical team?
- Are your potential colleagues a fairly homogenous group with similar interests and values – and do these match your own?
- What kind of relationships do the health professionals in this area have with their patients?
- Can you easily imagine working harmoniously with these people?

Training required

- Does the training required fit in with your skills and experience?
- How long will the training typically last?
- How competitive is this option?
- Will your academic qualifications and clinical experience enable you to realistically compete?

Future issues

- Is this field of medicine likely to change substantially in the next few years?
- What research questions are being studied?
- How might technology impact on this specialty?

Planning your research

The key is to create a well-rounded picture of the environment in which you'll be working, and think carefully about whether you can see yourself excelling on that career path. It's quite natural to have a preconceived idea of what a certain area might be like. But don't make a decision on this basis without further investigation. It would be unwise to limit yourself and rule out options unnecessarily, and you might be surprised at what some areas have to offer.

You may want to begin your career exploration activities by visiting our Specialty pages or continue in this section, Researching your options to find out other ways of

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