So you want to be ... a radiologist

Radiologists are doctors who use a variety of imaging methods to diagnose and treat patients. The specialty has dramatically progressed over the last two decades with the development of sophisticated new imaging technology. Conventional radiography, ultrasound (US), computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging and radionuclide medicine are techniques which the radiologist may use to provide anatomical and functional information about disease processes.

The range of image-guided procedures using US, CT or fluoroscopy has also greatly expanded. These techniques allow the radiologist to take biopsies of lesions as well as provide minimally-invasive therapeutic procedures. Advances in endovascular catheters and stents, as well as embolization materials, have greatly extended the role of interventional radiology. Increasingly imaging has a central role to play in determining patient management both in primary care and hospital medicine.

Is it for me?

Radiology is a field in which students and preregistration house officers have limited direct experience. Time spent in clinicoradiological conferences and in the reporting room is well spent to get a feel of what the work involves. Getting involved in a research or audit project may also be very valuable if a career in imaging is being considered. The skills needed for radiology are similar to those valued by other specialties. Good perceptive and deductive skills are essential, as well as the ability to communicate effectively and concisely. A broad interest and experience across medical and surgical specialties is also an advantage.

Dr Declan O'Regan *is Clinical Research Fellow and* **Professor Martin Blomley** *is Professor of Radiology, Imaging Sciences Department, Imperial College, Hammersmith Hospital, London W12 0HS*

Correspondence to: Dr D O'Regan

Training

There are no senior house officer posts in radiology in the UK although it is hoped that some foundation year programmes will include sessions in clinical radiology. There is stiff competition for national training numbers and many successful applicants will have attended radiology courses, been involved with a relevant audit or passed the first part of the Fellowship of the Royal College of Radiologists (FRCR) examination. Possessing the Membership of the Royal College of Physicians or Surgeons is desirable and a higher degree is an advantage. However, the traditional entry criteria may change with the advent of the Modernising Medical Careers initiative.

The current training programme lasts 5 years which consists of a core training component and a sub-specialty programme. Although radiology training in the UK is highly structured it can be adapted at an early stage to the trainee's requirements. A number of fellowships are available in the UK and abroad, and up to a year of training may be spent in research.

All trainees work towards passing the FRCR examination which provides a rigorous assessment of ability. The FRCR part 1 examines basic physics and may be taken before starting radiology training. Part 2A consists of multiple choice questions in each of six specialties which are taken at an appropriate time during training. Part 2B consists of two written reporting examinations and a 1 hour viva. Trainees participate in an on-call rota and the workload and complexity of cases will vary according to local service provision. Registrars are subject to regular assessments and logbook review which lead towards the certificate of completion of specialist training and entry onto the specialist register.

The Royal College of Radiologists is shortly commencing an 'integrated training initiative' which will aim to supplement traditional teaching with computer-aided learning at a number of radiology academies. A national validated case archive is being constructed for this purpose and aims to be one of the most extensive online collections available.

Career prospects

In the UK there are approximately 1500 consultant radiologists. Opportunities for consultant posts are currently quite favourable, especially in breast and interventional radiology. BJHM

KEY POINTS

- Radiology is a technology-driven specialty that continues to advance.
- Interventional radiology offers many minimally-invasive therapies.
- Gaining experience at an early stage is helpful in career planning.
- Competition for training numbers requires a radiology focussed curriculum vitae.
- Training is well-organized and incorporates the Fellowship of the Royal College of Radiologists examination.
- Career prospects and job satisfaction are excellent.
- For further information go to the Society of Radiologists in Training (www.thesrt.org.uk) and the Royal College of Radiologists (www.rcr.ac.uk) websites.