

So you want to be... a gynaecologist

Introduction

As a consultant gynaecologist for over 20 years I have had the privilege of training doctors from over 40 countries. My own professional development has taken me to several countries including Cyprus and Sweden. Gynaecology is hard work and challenging but the rewards in terms of satisfaction and contributions to women's health are immeasurable.

What does a gynaecologist do?

A gynaecologist deals with disorders of the female reproductive system and also problems of early pregnancy such as ectopic pregnancy and miscarriage. In the UK most gynaecologists are also obstetricians. There are some 1500 consultant gynaecologists in the UK, of whom 28% are female. The career is flexible, allowing some consultants to work part-time. A gynaecologist may work in:

- District general hospitals: generalist gynaecologists with one or several specialist interests such as urogynaecology
- Teaching hospitals: where gynaecologists and obstetricians are clearly divided
- Tertiary centres: subspecialist gynaecologists such as surgical oncologists
- The community: non-hospital based gynaecologists who provide care including contraception and sexual health.

There will clearly be areas of overlap in care between community, primary, secondary and tertiary care. In rare cases some gynaecologists become disease-specific practitioners.

The range of conditions treated by the average gynaecologist include:

- Disorders of menstruation
- Vaginal discharge
- Chronic pelvic pain
- Endometriosis
- Fibroids
- Prolapse.

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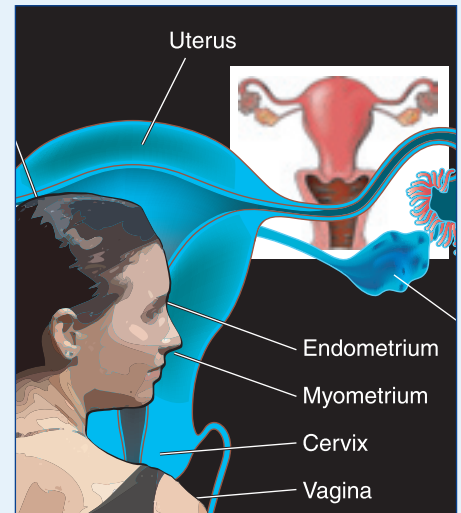
In a typical week the gynaecologist will deal with clinical duties covering emergency work, clinics, ward rounds and operating lists. In my case I have an additional specialist colposcopy clinic. Over 80% of my surgery is performed on a day care basis. The modern gynaecologist is part of a multidisciplinary team of doctors, technicians, nurses and managers and, as such, good communication skills and leadership qualities are essential.

What are the non-practice aspects?

There are also many non-clinical roles for the gynaecologist such as audit and research, teaching and training and, college, university and society activities. Audit and research are a mandatory part of continuous professional development within the specialty while teaching and training are a crucial part of the work we do. Enthusiasm in these activities is essential in encouraging recruitment into the specialty. We teach medical students, postgraduates, GPs and other health-care professionals.

During my career I have organized several teaching courses and workshops in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Nigeria and I am an external examiner for the West African College of Surgeons among others. I am also on the International Editorial Advisory Board of *Obs & Gynae Today*, a monthly scientific journal published in India. Such varied activities have enabled me to meet and befriend trainees and trainers around the world.

For the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) in the UK, I am an examiner, an official media spokesperson and a mentor for medical students. I have also served on committees, been a college tutor and many other specialty-related activities. I am a section council member of the Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) and was elected Honorary Treasurer for 2006/7. I believe that these extra-clinical activities are extremely important and worthwhile pursuing.



Gynaecology is one of the most interesting specialties available in medicine. There is speculation that in the future there will be three types of gynaecologists: a generalist carrying out diagnostic and basic procedures, a 'pelvic surgeon' who will perform minimal access and non-cancer surgery and the gynaecological oncologist who will concentrate on cancer surgery.

So who are the gynaecologists?

Gynaecologists are people who have a positive and optimistic approach to their work and to life outside medicine. I am proud to be closely associated with organizations such as the RCOG and RSM and I would hope to be a good ambassador to this exceptional specialty. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

Further information

www.rcog.org.uk/careers

KEY POINTS

- Gynaecology is a challenging and rewarding specialty.
- There are many subspecialties to choose from.
- Training is provided by a number of organizations, including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.
- There are many opportunities for development throughout the course of a career in gynaecology.