

# So you want to be ... a dermatologist

**D**ermatology is a highly visual specialty with more than two thousand diagnoses. Pattern recognition is a key skill, which often permits diagnosis on clinical observation alone. Owing to the wide range of diagnoses and relative lack of dermatology training at undergraduate level colleagues in other specialties often require dermatology input, thus ward consults are an integral part of most dermatologists' work.

Dermatology is a mainly outpatient-based specialty which offers a broad range of subspecialty areas. Most dermatologists perform skin surgery, with a proportion specialising in advanced surgical techniques to treat skin cancer. Other subspecialties on offer include medical dermatology, photobiology, laser, contact dermatitis, therapeutics, vulval dermatology, cosmetic dermatology and paediatric dermatology. Dermatologists have a large therapeutic armoury ranging from 'old fashioned' topical treatments such as crude coal tar, to cutting edge biological agents, and they are in the privileged position of routinely treating both adults and children.

## Training and entry requirements

There are limited opportunities to experience dermatology during the foundation and core medical training programme, but experience of other specialties such as genitourinary medicine, histopathology, rheumatology, plastic surgery and general practice can be very useful. In order to be eligible to apply for a specialty training in programme in dermatology an applicant is required to have completed foundation

years 1 and 2, and 2 years of core medical training. Membership of the Royal College of Physicians (MRCP) part 1 is currently an essential requirement to enter specialty training. It is preferable for candidates to have completed both part 1 and part 2 of the MRCP while working in general medical specialties, because after entering the specialty training programme in dermatology there is limited exposure to general medicine.

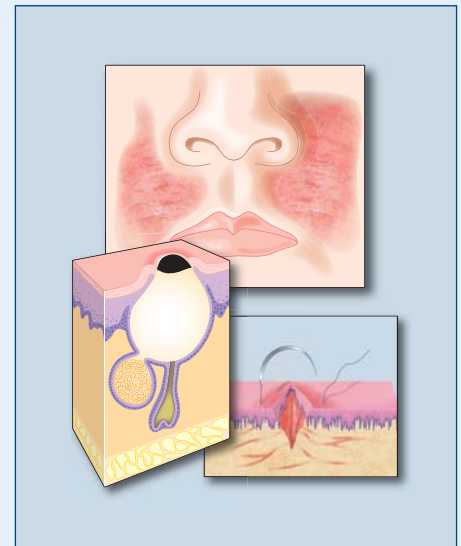
During the 4 years of specialty training, trainees will be exposed to a broad range of subspecialties and will be required to sit a knowledge-based assessment to demonstrate adequate competence before obtaining a certificate of completion of training (CCT). Training programmes do not offer dual accreditation with general medicine.

## Challenges

Dermatology is a popular specialty, thus application for training posts is highly competitive. Good candidates have often gained some prior experience of dermatology, for example through attendance at outpatient clinics or completion of a research project or audit.

## Benefits and opportunities

The majority of dermatology trainees are female (currently 78.2%) and there are a significant number of flexible trainees. The nature of the specialty including the relatively predictable hours and out of hospital on calls makes it lifestyle and family friendly. However, dermatology is a



demanding and academic specialty. Dermatology has a world-leading academic basis, and trainees are encouraged to take part in research. A relatively high proportion of trainees will take time out of program to undertake an MD or PhD. All trainees are expected to present at national conferences and write up cases of interest as a minimum.

Currently consultant job prospects for dermatology trainees are excellent. There are a number of unfilled consultant posts and services are expanding to reach targets driven by the 18-week pathway. There is a move for some dermatology services to be provided in the community, which may mean that in the future dermatologists will practise in several locations including hospital and primary care settings. Skin disease is an extremely common problem: approximately 15% of GP consultations are for a skin complaint, therefore it is likely that the high demand for specialist dermatology services will continue. **BJHM**

*Conflict of interest: none.*

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## KEY POINTS

- Dermatology is an outpatient-based specialty suited to flexible working patterns.
- There are a wide variety of subspecialties on offer.
- Skin surgery is an integral part of dermatology.
- Dermatologists work with patients of all age groups.
- Dermatology is becoming more and more research driven with ample research opportunities available for trainees.