

So you want to be ... a cardiologist

Cardiovascular disease accounts for 40% of all deaths in the UK. This has led to the development of a highly structured approach, both in the hospital setting and in the community, to the investigation and treatment of common cardiac conditions. These changes have resulted in tremendous opportunities for trainee cardiologists.

Training

Cardiology remains the most popular and competitive medical specialty. In 2007 over 1000 applicants applied for 100 cardiology ST3 numbers nationally. It is essential for a potential cardiology trainee to demonstrate early commitment to the specialty, for example, by attending courses, performing audits, presenting posters and writing case reports of relevance to the specialty, and completing MRCP (Member of Royal College of Physicians) examinations.

Training has changed radically, with the specialty registrar scheme replacing the old specialist registrar scheme. Following two generic foundation years post qualification and a senior house officer equivalent programme known as core training (CT1 and CT2), candidates are expected to apply for subspecialty training at ST3 level (equivalent to the old specialist registrar year 1). This then runs through to ST7 level. The new curriculum is competence based. In the first 1–2 years training covers general cardiology and internal medicine, followed by focused cardiology training in a tertiary centre, with subspecialty training in the final 2 years.

With the advent of Modernising Medical Careers it is no longer essential to undertake a 2–3-year period of research dur-

ing cardiology training, but certainly the London Deanery encourages those who wish to pursue a higher degree and out of programme experience abroad. Potential researchers are fortunate in having associations such as the British Heart Foundation for financial support.

What is cardiology?

Modern medicine focuses on subspecialization which, in cardiology, encompasses coronary intervention, electrophysiology and devices, imaging (echo, nuclear, magnetic resonance and computed tomography), cardiomyopathy and heart failure and adult congenital heart disease, all represented by affiliated groups under the auspices of the British Cardiovascular Society. There are also affiliated groups covering cardiovascular research, rehabilitation and one specifically for trainees (The British Junior Cardiologists' Association). Cardiologists in training are spoilt for choice. The subspecialties require different skills, application and personality. A trainee would be hard pressed not to find a niche in such a diverse specialty.

The more recent technical developments in electrophysiology, cardiac magnetic resonance imaging and other imaging modalities are immense and have become increasingly popular among trainees, who are beginning to express less interest than previously in coronary intervention, which has always been the most popular subspecialty.



Dual accreditation

Some cardiology trainees also accredit in general internal medicine, but the proportion is declining. The current drop off in dual accreditation highlights the breadth and complexity within cardiology. The advent of acute physicians with an interest in cardiology provides an alternative career choice for those wishing to maintain a foothold in general medicine at consultant level.

Is cardiology for you?

If you enjoy undertaking both investigative and therapeutic practical procedures in a rapidly advancing clinical field, with a wealth of evidence from decades of clinical trials and robust support structures for research and education, then you should seriously consider a career in cardiology. It remains one of the most demanding and rewarding fields of medicine. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

Dr S Velmurugan is ST4 in Cardiology, Queen's Hospital, Romford RM7 0AG, and **Dr DR Holdright** is Consultant Cardiologist, The Heart Hospital, London

Correspondence to: Dr S Velmurugan

KEY POINTS

- There have been changes in training following the advent of Modernising Medical Careers which those wishing to pursue a career in cardiology need to be aware of.
- There is a vast breadth of subspecialization within cardiology.
- This article addresses the attributes and requirements needed to successfully compete for a cardiology training number.