

So you want to be ... a urologist

I will not cut for the stone... I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art' said Hippocrates in his famous oath and thus urology came to be defined as the first of all the surgical specialties (Herr, 2008). Urologists deal with medical and surgical diseases involving the male and female urinary tracts and the male reproductive system. The wide spectrum of disease and operative techniques has long attracted some of the brightest and enthusiastic trainees.

The specialty

From the newborn with an undescended testicle to the 82-year-old man with bladder outlet obstruction, urological disease is very common, has great variety and affects every age group. Urology has become one of the most technologically advanced surgical specialties with urologists being at the vanguard in the use of lasers, endoscopes, laparoscopes and robotics.

With great advancements in pharmacotherapy and minimally invasive surgical techniques, there has been a tremendous shift in the way urological diseases are managed in the past 30 years. The outcome of this has been the development of two types of practice within the specialty: core urology and sub-specialty practice.

Core urology involves the investigation and management of common conditions such as benign prostatic hyperplasia through both medical and endoscopic means. The areas of sub-specialty interest are endo-urology, oncology, andrology and female, functional and reconstructive urology. These offer the opportunity to develop skills in complex open, endoscopic, laparoscopic and robotic procedures (Murphy et al, 2006). Occasionally, some trainees choose to specialize in renal trans-

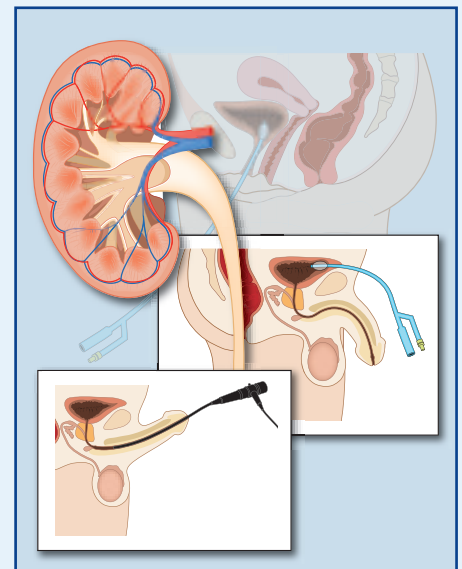
plantation. Most consultants are involved in elements of both core and sub-specialty practice but it is possible to practice solely core urology.

Training pathway

The training pathway for urologists has gone through several changes. The first step is to secure a core training position following the foundation programme. To be competitive, applicants should try to gain experience by seeking a urology placement during the foundation years. This is also the time to enhance your CV by performing audits (preferably surgical) and completing courses including Advanced Trauma Life Support, Advanced Life Support and basic surgical skills. Publishing research or articles is desirable as is obtaining Part A of the new Membership of the Royal College of Surgeons examination.

In some deaneries core training (2 years) is themed with a guaranteed 6 months of urology in the first year and up to a year in the second year. Other deaneries have reverted to the old basic surgical training model with trainees rotating through several different specialties. During this time trainees are expected to achieve the knowledge and competencies defined by the Intercollegiate Surgical Curriculum Programme (2008) through the completion of work-based assessments and a surgical logbook. Membership of the Royal College of Surgeons examinations including the new part B Objective Structured Clinical Examination should be completed as well as further specialty-specific courses, audit and research.

After core training entry to specialist trainee year 3 level is through open competition and a national application system started in 2009. The competition for places is high and some trainees choose to spend time doing research to improve their chances. The training programme lasts 5 or 6 years with the initial years spent developing a firm grounding in core operative skills and patient management before completing the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in Urology examination. In the final years of training, there is the opportunity to pursue a sub-specialty interest.



Is urology for you?

Urology requires intelligent enthusiastic people with first rate communication and interpersonal skills who enjoy interaction with patients and colleagues. For the operative part, good basic manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination are essential. Organization combined with a strong work ethic is important as the urological week is busy with daily rounds, full clinics and operating lists. The out of hours commitments are relatively light compared to other specialties, allowing for an excellent work-life balance. Perhaps this is why the image of the urologist has come to be of a sociable, down-to-earth happy surgeon! **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

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KEY POINTS

- There is a wide breadth of urological disease with an increasing emphasis on medical and minimally invasive management.
- There is a great range of operative techniques incorporating the latest technology.
- There is a definite trend towards increasing sub-specialization in urology.

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