

# So you want to be ... a plastic surgeon

**P**lastic and reconstructive surgery is a varied and extremely rewarding specialty which encompasses a wide variety of subspecialties that can make a tangible difference to the lives of patients.

The origins of plastic surgery precede the description of nasal reconstruction by Sushruta Samhita in India (600 BC), but the speciality evolved its modern guise as a result of the reconstructive challenges arising from the first and second world wars. Since then, plastic surgeons have been extensively involved in developing surgical techniques such as microsurgical reconstruction to solve complex and previously unreconstructable problems faced by many different specialities.

Plastic surgery is home to many subspecialty interests including hand surgery, burns, head and neck cancer, cutaneous malignancies, oculoplastics, paediatric surgery, craniofacial surgery, trauma surgery, breast surgery, genital and gynaecological reconstruction, and aesthetic surgery.

Plastic surgeons operate on all parts of the body, collaborating with many other specialties including ear, nose and throat surgery, orthopaedics, dermatology, gynaecology, maxillofacial surgery, neurosurgery and breast surgery, as well as other health professionals.

## Training

Surgery is a very popular career choice for medical students and currently entry to each surgical training stage is via a competitive selection process.

After medical school, trainees will spend 2 years in a foundation programme to gain experience in a variety of specialties. They then apply for 2 years of core surgical training, consisting of placements in different surgical specialties each lasting from 4–6 months; these are often in themed

**Mr Jatin R Joshi** is ST2 in Plastic Surgery and **Mr Bran Sivakumar** is Specialist Registrar in Plastic Surgery at the Royal Free Hospital, London NW3 2QG

Correspondence to: Mr JR Joshi

programmes related to the trainee's career preferences. In plastic surgery this usually involves time spent in trauma and orthopaedics, general surgery and plastic surgery.

The trainee will then apply for higher specialty training via a highly competitive national selection process. Successful applicants must have obtained Membership of the Royal College of Surgeons and spent a minimum of 6 months in plastic surgery posts; many trainees will also have completed a period of research culminating in a higher degree.

Plastic surgery training is usually 6 years in duration. To gain the certificate of completion of training, trainees are required to pass the intercollegiate specialty examination (FRCS Plast). Upon gaining the certificate of completion of training, doctors are then eligible to be placed on the General Medical Council's specialist register and are able to apply for consultant posts. Many plastic surgery trainees also complete additional fellowships to gain further training in their chosen subspecialty. These fellowships are often sought at centres of excellence around the globe.

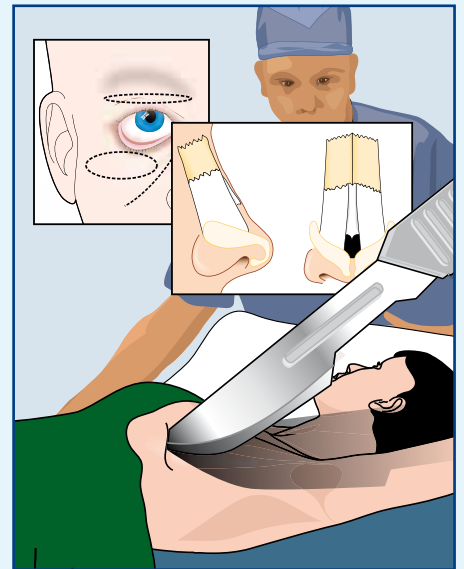
The following qualities are desirable in a plastic surgeon:

- A good eye for aesthetics and attention to detail
- Meticulous technique
- Good time management and organizational skills
- Ability to remain calm under pressure
- Able to foster good working relationships as part of a multidisciplinary team
- Achievements and accolades in relevant academic research.

## The life of a trainee

The life of a trainee plastic surgeon is extremely varied. Generally, there will be four to five operating sessions a week, in addition to one or two outpatient clinics. As the trainee develops, the daily role will also include increasing amounts of administration, management and teaching.

Emergency work is a core part of daily life, and much of a trainee's workload will involve dealing with urgent cases. They will



take part in an on-call rota and could be called upon to work on patients with burns or severe hand, facial or lower limb injuries.

## The future

Plastic surgery is a relatively small specialty, but the number of consultant posts has doubled in the last 20 years and it has become an integral part of hospital practice. The specialty also attracts more women than other surgical specialties with around 25% of plastic surgery trainees being female.

Those who choose plastic surgery as a career will continue to encounter new challenges in a field that is always changing. Anyone wishing to obtain more information about the specialty should visit the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons website ([www.bapras.org.uk](http://www.bapras.org.uk)). **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

## KEY POINTS

- Plastic surgery is a dynamic and advancing field that encompasses a wide variety of subspecialities covering virtually every part of the body.
- Training follows a structured 6-year programme that culminates in an intercollegiate specialty examination.
- A plastic surgeon's weekly schedule is split between emergency and elective operating lists and outpatient clinics.
- Most trainees and plastic surgeons will maintain an academic interest throughout their careers to help refine and develop the speciality.