

# So you want to be ... a geriatrician

The improvement in health and social care over the preceding century is reaping its reward in longer and healthier lives, making the over-80s the fastest growing population group. Most elderly individuals are living independent lives, but as their number grows and chronic disease sets in, so does the need for experts in the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of illness in older patients... geriatricians!

While the National Service Framework for Older People laid out the cornerstones for an optimal health and social care for older people in 21st century, it also highlighted the challenges that geriatricians and other health professionals will come across in meeting those standards, tackling age discrimination and strengthening working in partnerships. The aim will be to deliver patient-centred care in the community as close to home as possible and, when necessary, in state-of-the-art specialized units.

## The role

Those interested in a tranquil existence, stop reading now.

It is 4.55 pm and, as every Monday afternoon, Peter walks out of an intermediate care unit in a small community hospital where disabled elderly patients undergo targeted rehabilitation aimed at facilitating a smooth transition back into their own homes. The working day started much earlier with a teaching round in an acute medical ward that also included a mini-clinical evaluation exercise of his foundation year 1 doctor, chairing an in-house geriatric training meeting (lunch

provided), a rehabilitation ward round and a multidisciplinary team conference.

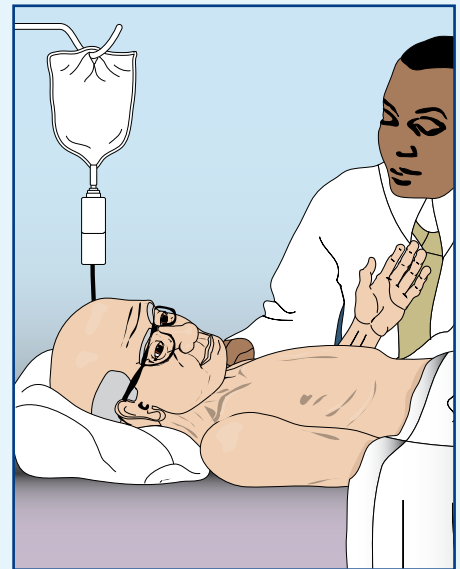
Within a few hours he has been involved in all facets of the patient pathway and he has been challenged by a wide range of medical, legal and ethical dilemmas. He has managed acutely ill and chronically disabled individuals of all ages, necessitating not only his skills as a physician but also his well-rehearsed communication, managerial and team working skills.

This is just the beginning of another week that will provide multiple opportunities to make use of his training in teaching, appraisal, clinical audit and research. He will continue to develop partnerships with primary care and communities in an attempt to fulfil his vision of a 21st century falls service and then find time for committee work, collaboration to academic geriatric medicine, self reflection and completion of his continuing personal education.

Geriatric medicine is more than just the medical specialty responsible for treating the most numerous and complex group of patients. Life as a geriatrician involves more than multidisciplinary team work, individualized comprehensive geriatric assessments and targeted intervention programmes. Geriatrics is a vocation only to be realized through hard work, stern determination and clear patient-centred motivation.

## Future challenges

In future, geriatricians will have an increasing role in the community helping deliver improved acute assessments, intermediate care and rehabilitation. Geriatricians will



continue to support the work of GPs, community matrons, nurses and other members of the community multidisciplinary team, while playing a leading role in their training and education.

## Have you got what it takes?

If you are one of over 1000 geriatricians working within the largest specialty in England and Wales receive our warmest congratulations; if you are training to become a geriatrician, be proud to be one of the specialist registrars preparing to further develop this fast-growing section of medicine. If you are still pondering the benefits of a career in geriatrics feel assured you will never be out of work, you will constantly have to demonstrate your value as the leader of a successful multidisciplinary team, and despite the ups and downs of a busy working life, is there anything more fulfilling than making a difference to the care and wellbeing of older people?

Aim high, become a geriatrician! **BJHM**

*Conflict of interest: none.*

### Further information

British Geriatrics Society ([www.bgs.org.uk/Trainees/career\\_gm.htm](http://www.bgs.org.uk/Trainees/career_gm.htm))

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## KEY POINTS

- Geriatrics will remain a rapidly advancing and fast-growing field for doctors and allied health-care professionals.
- A geriatrician is more than a physician with a specialist interest in older people, but rather the leader and key component of a multidisciplinary team providing a holistic approach throughout a patient's care pathway and journey.
- The UK is at the forefront of training in geriatric medicine.
- Future geriatricians will have an increasing role in the community and working in partnership with other health professionals to develop and deliver improved health care closer to home.