

A day in the life of a paediatric rheumatology trainee (Dr Flora McErlane)

Paediatric rheumatology is a stimulating and extremely rewarding specialty. I have been training on the National Grid in paediatric rheumatology since 2006 and believe that the specialty offers trainees an unparalleled range of opportunities in both clinical and academic medicine, within a well-developed and well-supported national training programme.

Paediatric rheumatologists are a select group of doctors who enjoy both talking and listening. The specialty relies heavily on the arts of history taking, examination and communication, with ever increasing opportunities to develop individual areas of interest, ranging from basic science to the application of modern technologies such as ultrasound to aid diagnosis and joint injections. We live in exciting times with growing numbers of designer drugs derived from basic science discoveries continually improving outcomes for children with inflammatory diseases.

Musculoskeletal symptoms are common in the paediatric population and can be the presenting feature of a wide variety of acute and chronic complaints, both physical and psychosocial. A paediatric rheumatology trainee enjoys interacting with children of all ages, learning how to interpret the frequently subtle verbal and non-verbal clues hidden within a consultation. Reaching a rheumatological diagnosis can be time-consuming and the trainees should “enjoy the chase”, treating each patient on his or her own merits, and taking every opportunity to learn from the opinions and experiences of each member of the multi-disciplinary team.

Paediatric rheumatologists care for children with a broad range of illnesses, ranging from mechanical aches and pains to complex life threatening multi-system inflammatory disorders. There are many reasons trainees choose the specialty; some are attracted by the complex basic science and immunology underpinning many of the inflammatory disorders, others by the local and multicentre research opportunities and some, like myself, relish the opportunity to work within the supportive and experienced multidisciplinary teams and clinical networks.

Paediatric rheumatology is a relatively small but expanding specialty with increasing job opportunities. National grid trainees meet up several times a year and the annual trainees meeting is a wonderful opportunity to network, learning from the experiences of peers and developing innovative multicentre audit and research projects. Trainees are a valued part of the paediatric rheumatology community and contribute a great deal of work to national and international meetings. Many paediatric rheumatology trainees undertake a higher degree during their training, supported by one of the experienced and enthusiastic academics within the field. Opportunities for research are increasing and include basic science, clinical and educational areas of interest and trainees are encouraged to get involved at an early stage in their careers. There is a national shortage of paediatric rheumatologists and although it can be difficult to predict where and when a consultant post will become available, job prospects are likely to remain excellent for the foreseeable future.

There is a great deal of flexibility within the specialty for different training pathways, with many trainees taking time out of programme for research. Part time training is also achievable and having had two children I have been working flexibly for the past few years. I am confident that my particular training needs have been considered very carefully by the specialty training advisors. Flexible trainees are well supported within the specialty, for example, it is entirely possible to undertake formal research or higher

degrees on a part time basis.

In summary, paediatric rheumatology is a broad and rapidly developing specialty, offering trainees the opportunity to develop a wide range of clinical and academic interests within the context of a well-supported, fascinating and highly rewarding clinical career.