

Flexible training and Genitourinary Medicine

With increasing numbers of doctors aspiring to achieve a happier work-life balance many are considering flexible training and working part-time.

Genitourinary Medicine is particularly amenable to flexible working patterns with its sessional work: Generally training in all aspects of the subject can be obtained any day of the week!

What is flexible training?

Flexible training is defined as part time training which involves limited participation in medical activities for at least half the time of a full time trainee. It is possible to become "flexible" at any stage during training. Flexible trainees normally agree to do between five and seven sessions a week, with pro rata on call.

If you wish to work 19 hours per week or less the flexible careers scheme may be more appropriate but time spent on this scheme is not accredited for training (see www.doh.gov.uk/iwl/doctorsguide.pdf for more information).

How to apply

You may be eligible for flexible training if you are a parent, have a chronic illness, have a disability or if you are the main carer of a dependent relative. Although in theory you can apply if you have religious commitments or "well founded individual reasons associated with your own personal or professional development" most deans are unable to fund such posts.

If you wish to apply for an SpR post but intend to work flexibly you have to be interviewed in competition with full-time appointees. It is definitely worth discussing your intentions in advance with the flexible dean so that your eligibility can be ascertained and arrangements for funding put in place before the interview.

Specialist registrars can switch from full to part time training without having to reapply, providing they meet the eligibility criteria. Before starting flexible training, a personal training programme must be planned and approved by the relevant royal college. The college tutor or designated consultant supervisor will draw up a weekly timetable, taking into consideration your training needs. The paperwork is then forwarded to the royal college via the regional adviser.

Funding

Funding for flexible training is tight across the UK and if you are eligible you may have to wait for several months before funding is available. Being appointed as a SpR and being eligible for flexible training will not guarantee an immediate place and you may be offered the option of either waiting until funding is available or taking the post as a full- time trainee initially.

Strengths of flexible training

- Improved work-life balance.
- Improved pay- deal means often receive more than 60% full timer's salary even if working 60% full time.
- Helps make happier doctors
- Added maturity of trainees with extended length of training.

Potential pitfalls of flexible training

- It takes longer to complete training.
- Contemporary trainees leave and take on consultant posts possibly making you feel "left behind".
- The new pay deal has endangered the scheme. It costs trusts more per hour to employ such doctors compared with a full time equivalent, making some trusts reluctant to employ part timers.
- You may feel that you are not doing justice to either job, at work or at home. With being a carer for a child or other, the days spent at work often have firmly set start and finish times and often there is not the option to stay late at work to finish a task off.
- You may feel isolated at work and not feel a vital part of the firm or department
- Others may perceive you as taking your career less seriously because you are working part-time.

Tips for successful flexible training

- Successful flexible training often requires a greater degree of motivation and keenness.
- It is important that people view you as an asset—contribute at departmental meetings and audit sessions -make others know that you take your career seriously.
- Seek out training opportunities—you may have to shift your days around to learn a full complement of skills and knowledge. As a parent you should be eligible to take a lieu day if you are attending courses on days that you do not normally work as you will have to pay for an extra day of childcare.
- Develop your curriculum vitae so it is at least comparable if not better than full time trainees.

References:

1. Macdonald R. Flexible and family friendly working in the NHS *BMJ* 2003; **326**:85 (15 March)
2. Dosani S. Flexible training: moving on up. *BMJ* 2003; **327**:s59-s60 (23 August)
3. Sundaram R. An insider's guide to flexible training. *BMJ* 2003; **327**:s61 (23 August)