

Careers in psychiatric specialities

9. Academic psychiatry

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Careers in academic psychiatry can follow various paths but usually are aimed at achieving a university appointment at consultant grade; i.e. senior lecturer, reader, or professor.

Career prospects

The prospects at present for the aspiring academic psychiatrist are less favourable than in the recent past. This is due to university cutbacks which have resulted in many academic posts being frozen or axed. Very few departments are expanding and the majority are contracting. Thus, competition for any post is considerable.

Training requirements

There is no specific training requirement. Applicants must, however, have had sufficient clinical training to fulfil the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Higher Psychiatric Training for the equivalent NHS grade to the university post being sought; lecturer-registrar/senior registrar, senior lecturer/professor-consultant.

The main emphasis will be on research experience, and if one is contemplating an academic career it is usually best to get on to the academic career ladder at the earliest possible stage. A small research project as a registrar may lead to a full-time research post with the possibility of moving on to a lecturer post. Many training schemes, in addition to MRCPsych courses, now offer opportunities to complete an MSc or MPhil degree, which usually have a research component as part of the overall requirements. At some point in training, it is important to carry out a *substantial* piece of research work which can then be written up for either an MD or PhD. A PhD needs to be registered prospectively with the university, and a completed MSc or MPhil may be a stipulated requirement, before this can be done. An MD, on the other hand, requires no prior registration or higher qualifi-

cations, and is presented by the candidate to the university at the time of completion.

A number of publications in refereed journals is essential for a senior lecturer post and, increasingly, emphasis is placed on the ability of the candidate to attract research funds to the department. Thus, being a named grant holder for externally funded research projects is also important.

In addition, some luck is also needed. Thus an important factor is being the right person, in the right place, at the right time.

Job structure

The ratio of academic to clinical work varies from post to post. Most senior lecturer posts are divided approximately equally. Some posts, however, may have only two research sessions, while others may be almost full-time academic positions.

The clinical work usually involves general psychiatry, although there are an increasing number of specialist posts being advertised, e.g. senior lecturer in old age psychiatry. Academic commitments will include a substantial amount of teaching, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. This involves not only delivering lectures and seminars, but also arranging and administering whole lecture courses and examinations for medical students, psychiatric trainees and other health professionals.

Developing ideas for new research projects, applying for funds, setting up and supervising research work are important functions of the senior lecturer. The bulk of the research work is usually carried out by trainees or other research assistants.

A large proportion of time will inevitably be spent on both university and NHS administration.

Satisfactions and frustrations

Being a senior lecturer is an interesting and varied job. The post is usually in a teaching hospital with the

support of high quality junior staff. There are opportunities for travel to attend and speak at meetings in this country and abroad. Sabbatical leave of between six months to a year can be taken at some universities (after a specified period of time in post) for the senior lecturer to work abroad or write. Teaching and encouraging young trainees to develop their own research interests and areas of expertise is a particularly rewarding aspect of the job. Senior lecturer posts are generally more flexible than consultant posts: they can be ultimate career posts but more often lead to professorial appointments or a further move to an attractive NHS consultancy.

Conflicting demands between university and NHS commitments can be a source of frustration and invariably clinical work intrudes into research time. Keeping whole days free for research, with a research base away from the hospital, is one way of protecting valuable time. Having an effective secretary who can filter phone calls and requests is extremely important, and spending one day a week at home to write can be another useful ploy. Although the senior lecturer has equivalent clinical status to the professor, he/she does not have complete autonomy. Not to be one's own boss after so many years of training can be an occasional source of discontent.

There is, in addition, considerable pressure to generate new research ideas and unfortunately, present economic trends dictate that obtaining research monies are the yard stick by which one is judged.

Final comment

Being a senior lecturer is a stimulating and rewarding job for the trainee with a Type A personality! Work is more varied than in an NHS post. There are greater opportunities for travel and meeting and collaborating with fellow researchers from around the world. Developing new ideas and working on original projects can be very exciting. With recent financial pressures on universities, however, senior lecturer posts are becoming more pressured and less rewarding.

Further reading

BLACK, D. & GUTHRIE, E. (1990) Everything you always wanted to know about research but were afraid to ask. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 14, 719–720.

WILKINSON, G. (1990) Sixteen thoughts on getting that paper published! *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 14, 252–254.

Psychiatric Bulletin (1991), 15, 420–421

Training matters

A local research course for trainees in psychiatry

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Trainees in psychiatry are encouraged to become involved in research during their training (Sims, 1988). As Crisp (1990) points out, research skills are basic to a number of attributes such as problem

solving abilities, consultation skills, self-audit, and the audit of others. Both the College and senior registrar appointment committees seem to value some research experience as it demands persistence,