Occupational Medicine

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Background

Occupational Medicine (OM) is a clinical specialty in which one can encounter almost any medical condition. OM is strongly involved in current national and international agenda on work, particularly including helping those who currently do not work to do so as highlighted in Dame Carol Black’s report. It provides opportunities to prevent or remedy illnesses and identify their causes in the workplace, as well as to improve health by influencing those factors and taking a holistic approach to working people’s health. There is also closer involvement in patients’ lives (than in other specialties) through what they do at work and the ability to visit fascinating workplaces e.g. motor racing car or aircraft manufacture. In some cases, opportunities to travel overseas exist. OM practitioners make routine use of their ability to communicate with many individuals e.g. managers, HR professionals, Health and Safety officers, Trade Union representatives, Disability and Employment specialists and groups of workers as well as other health professionals, both face to face and in writing. Other activities include health promotion, teaching, policy creation, committee work, audit and involvement in commercial activities such as bids, tenders and presentations. There are generally no on-call or weekend duties; OM can be ‘family friendly’ with opportunities to train less than full time. OM doctors exploit their ability to move through various jobs and to be self-employed if they choose, thus creating considerable opportunities for variety and sub-specialisation. There are a number of special interest groups and associations.

Training follows the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM)’s very broad curriculum including not just clinical medicine and investigation of ill health, but also disability, employment law, health and safety legislation, epidemiology, toxicology, occupational hygiene, travel medicine and research. In the UK, specialist training in occupational medicine (OM) lasts for 4 years if undertaken full time. Programmes begin at ST3. There is thus a requirement to have undertaken suitable core training prior to this in areas such as medicine, surgery, psychiatry, public health or general practice. There is no requirement to hold the MRCP or MRCGP, although these are desirable. OM Specialty Training (and OM practice) takes place in:

- NHS
- Industry (various organisations including public and private sector)
- Armed Forces

There is a requirement to pass Parts 1 and 2 of the examination for membership of the FOM (MFOM), Part 1 normally in ST3 and Part 2 in ST5 or ST6. There is a separate requirement to submit a dissertation based on original research or a review, or published research previously undertaken by the trainee.

Training Posts

OM training locations in the HETV region currently include:
• John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford. This is a busy NHS department in new premises with two Consultant posts as well as a trainee.
• Oxford University. The Occupational Health (OH) department includes two Consultants, an additional visiting Consultant and a sessional Consultant in infectious diseases to advise on travel overseas.
• Milton Keynes Hospital. This is a slightly smaller, but busy NHS department with one Consultant.
• Milton Keynes Occupational Health. This is a private provider of OH services. The Medical Director is an experienced Educational supervisor. Trainees in Milton Keynes will spend time in both NHS and private centres.
• Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading. A single Consultant in OM currently provides training in this department.
• Corporate Health Limited, Slough. This is another private provider of OH services whose Medical Director is specifically interested in specialty training.

Rotations between pairs of these locations are in an advanced state of development in order to ensure that OM trainees gain training, experience and competencies in both NHS and industry and in both public and private sectors. It is expected that there may also be opportunities to spend time in suitable posts in the Wessex LETB region.

Teaching

This includes teaching in each training location by the Consultants present to complement workplace experience and workplace-based assessments. OM training is also formally undertaken externally, commonly by enrolling on the Manchester University distance learning course. It is possible to complete a third year in the latter and thus gain an MSc, enabling the trainee to write a dissertation which is also likely to be suitable for the MFOM. In addition, OM trainees actively participate in a programme of organised workplace visits to locations not included in training, to gain knowledge of a broad variety of workplaces and industries and receive instruction from other specialists.

Areas of excellence

The trainee group which organises and participates in workplace visits to see industries and workplaces not normally included in training currently includes trainees from a wide area of the UK (including all three training sectors), thus affording a considerable variety of workplace experience and learning as well as contact with many other trainees who can share what they have learned and done. Additionally, the rotations currently being planned are expected to be amongst the best in the country for breadth of training.

Further information

Anyone interested in OM training can obtain useful information from the FOM website (www.fom.ac.uk). Alternatively, they can contact the TPD, trainee representative or local OM Consultants. In addition, the trainee group welcomes those considering OM training on its visits.