

Ask the trainers

How to set yourself up for the 3 years of GP training

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Question: How do I prepare myself for the next 3 years?

Answer

Congratulations on choosing GP training – a career path that offers immense rewards, both professionally and personally. As a GP, you'll play a vital role in your community, impacting lives while enjoying a flexible work–life balance. However, GP training is demanding and requires core skills, including effective communication, teamwork, resilience and handling uncertainty. As John Murtagh emphasises, succeeding in general practice involves bridging medical knowledge with communication and empathy. GP training is a journey of progression from competence to excellence, mastering both the science and art of patient interaction.

Navigating emotional and psychological pressures

Recognise the emotional and psychological demands of this training journey. Building a strong support network is essential, helping you connect with peers and share experiences. Engage with online communities, like WhatsApp groups, to maintain communication and camaraderie. Scheduling dedicated time with your educational supervisor (ES) also offers a safe space to discuss your goals, progress and any necessary adjustments. Social gatherings with your clinical supervisors and team further enhance these connections, creating a support system outside the workplace.

Structuring your training and hospital posts

Most GP training schemes include 12 months in hospital posts and 24 months in GP placements. Early on, identify your learning needs and knowledge gaps. Selecting complementary hospital posts can help broaden your experience, while ST2 training posts often offer innovative roles split between GP and specialties, such as palliative care, sports medicine, sexual health, etc.

Planning is crucial in the 3-year programme, so set a timeline for completing the RCGP exams (Applied Knowledge Test

(AKT) and Simulated Consultation Assessment (SCA)) to stay on track. These exams assess not only medical knowledge but also the ability to interpret complex scenarios under time pressure.

Using the ePortfolio effectively

The GP Trainee Portfolio and Workplace-based Assessment (WPBA) are essential tools in your training. WPBA is one of three components of the MRCGP assessment system, enabling continuous skill assessment throughout your journey. Learning logs encourage reflection, a core component for growth and self-awareness while providing a qualitative view of your development in the 13 professional capabilities and eight Clinical Experience Groups (CEG). Regular reflection helps deepen your understanding of patient interactions, enhancing your abilities in modern general practice.

Transitioning to primary care: Confidence and integrity

Starting GP training can be overwhelming, especially as you take on new levels of responsibility. Many new GPs face anxiety about managing diverse presentations but acknowledging your limits and seeking help are integral parts of professional growth. Honesty, including admitting mistakes, is crucial. Use Learning Event Analyses (LEAs) in the ePortfolio to document key lessons and build confidence over time, embracing a culture of continuous learning and integrity.

Familiarise yourself with the GP curriculum

Developing a structured approach to learning is essential. Start by reviewing the GP concise curriculum guide to identify your unique needs and areas for improvement. Resources like the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, clinical knowledge summaries and the British National Formulary treatment summaries can address knowledge gaps, and iterative, hands-on learning in practice will steadily enhance your competence. Learning through patient cases and follow-ups

fosters genuine understanding, leading to confidence over time.

Maximising personal study and structured educational sessions

Use study time effectively and engage proactively in educational sessions. Plan tutorial topics with your GP trainer, and actively participate in individual training programmes, half- or full-day sessions, to reinforce core skills. Discussions with peers during these sessions strengthen core competencies, preparing you for the challenges of general practice. Consistent study habits, cross-cultural friendships and informal study groups build a strong support network and deepen understanding of UK patient expectations and foster mutual support.

Holiday planning and work–life balance

In a 1095-day programme, managing annual leave is essential to unwind and rejuvenate. Hospital posts typically require 12 weeks' advance notice, while GP posts need 6–8 weeks. Discuss any reasonable adjustments early in your training if you have specific needs. If balancing work and personal life becomes challenging owing to health or family issues, consider applying for less than full-time (LTFT) training, which also requires 12 weeks' notice.

Effective communication with clinical and non-clinical staff

Strong communication and teamwork are crucial in general practice. Understanding each team member's role enables you to delegate tasks effectively and make the most of their skills. For international medical graduates (IMGs), engaging in casual conversations with non-clinical staff helps you understand British cultural nuances, dialects and colloquialisms. Building relationships with your team is invaluable for WPBA, leadership projects and gaining insight into the needs of vulnerable patients.

Embracing feedback: A key to growth and effective patient care

Feedback is essential for growth in experiential fields like medicine. For GP registrars, feedback uncovers insights often hidden owing to self-assessment blind spots. By remaining open and teachable, registrars transform feedback from a perceived threat into a powerful tool for self-reflection and growth. Constructive feedback – from supervisors, peers or patients – not only enhances skills but also fosters a responsive approach to patient care. Embracing feedback involves actively internalising and applying it for advancement in practice.

Holistic patient care and community awareness

In general practice, holistic care involves looking beyond symptoms to identify underlying social or psychological factors. Building trust with patients is essential; addressing practical needs, such as signing various forms or writing supporting letters, builds goodwill. This trust can later motivate patients to engage in health actions, like screenings or vaccinations. Partnering with community services and connecting with local organisations enhances support for patients' broader needs.

Leadership and community engagement

Enhance your GP training by developing leadership and community engagement skills. Volunteering, representing peers or joining forums fosters growth and networking. Participating in quality improvement activity and projects, and contributing to journals or conferences builds research, communication and innovation skills, advancing your career.

We would like to invite readers to write in with any other questions they'd like to ask about general practice specialty training. Questions to be sent to editorial office editorialoffice@innovaitjournal.co.uk.

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References and further information

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