

TYPES OF DOCTOR

What is a doctor?

There are lots of types of doctors. Some work in local health centres, some in hospitals and some in other areas such as the armed forces. Some doctors perform technically difficult things such as surgery, while others treat patients with medicines or carry out tests and do research. This is a guide to the different types of doctor and what they do.

Foundation doctors

After four or five years at medical school, most students qualify and become foundation doctors. In the UK, all doctors spend their first two years as a foundation doctor getting experience in a wide range of areas, which gives them an idea of what type of doctor they want to become. This might be a general practitioner (GP), also known as a local doctor, a psychiatrist (helping someone with their mental health), or a doctor in an emergency department, to name just a few of the choices. Foundation doctors are working and being paid, but because they are junior doctors they are very closely supervised. They are still learning how to care for patients.



After two years as a foundation doctor, these are some of the other areas you might choose to specialise in:

Anaesthetists

Anaesthetists are doctors who put people to sleep during operations and look after very sick patients in hospital intensive care units. In this role you would need a range of different skills. For example, when patients are put to sleep in some operations it can reduce people's ability to breathe, so these doctors use complex equipment and skills to keep patients breathing during surgery.

Emergency medicine

Some doctors become experts in emergency medicine, working in busy emergency departments in support of patients who may have serious or life-threatening illnesses and injuries. These doctors will have very little or no notice of who will be coming through the emergency department door next, they need to think on their feet and act fast. It can sometimes be a race against time when working in an emergency department.

General Practitioners (GPs)

GPs are doctors who look after patients' physical and mental health, from the cradle to the grave. They are based in GP surgeries and health centres in local areas and are usually the first point of contact for anyone who is unwell. As a GP, if a patient was very ill, you might arrange hospital care for them, but you would look after most patients yourself. Part of your role would involve caring for people with long-term health problems like asthma, diabetes, heart failure and mental health issues. You would work with a large team which may include practice nurses, health care assistants, pharmacists and other health professionals. Being a GP is an interesting, challenging career where the next patient through your door could have either a life-threatening illness or a simple viral infection – and it would be your job to decide which.

Intensive care medicine

Working in intensive care medicine is, as the name suggests, pretty intense. These doctors manage very ill patients who may be at risk of, or recovering from, potentially life-threatening conditions. As well as providing expert care to patients, these doctors will also have a key role in supporting the patient's family and friends at this worrying time.

Obstetrics and gynaecology

These doctors care for pregnant women, the unborn child, and manage diseases that are specific to women. It might involve fertility care, working with women who might have conditions that complicate their pregnancy or supporting women with other aspects of their health and wellbeing.

Occupational medicine

Having a job is rewarding in many ways but for some people, their work is also the cause of their medical problems. These doctors diagnose, manage and prevent conditions that have been caused or made worse by people being in the workplace. They are concerned with all the effects of work on people's health and wellbeing.

Oncologists

These doctors manage patients who have cancer. They use a range of approaches such as drugs or targeted radiation (types of energy) to destroy cancer cells. Helping patients understand and come to terms with their condition is another important part of the role.

Ophthalmology

These surgically trained doctors care for patients who have eye conditions. They manage those with long term eye disease and treat patients of all ages. They may treat people with eye diseases or help restore someone's sight through surgery, for example, if someone's eye lens becomes blurred or if the back of their eye lining becomes detached.

Paediatricians

These doctors are specially trained to look after children and young people from birth to the age of 18. This can involve treating anyone from babies to older teenagers with a wide range of illnesses and conditions, working with children, young people and their families. They look after children of all ages with any health condition – so it is a very varied job. Some children may need to go into hospital with things like asthma attacks, vomiting or chest infections; happily most children get better quickly and go home after a few hours or a day or two, but some have more serious or complex problems. It is the job of the paediatrician to spot those children. Paediatricians also have a role in public health, helping children avoid getting poorly in the first place, and in children's mental wellbeing. Some of these types of doctor specialise in a particular age or group of illnesses. They might look after premature babies or babies who are poorly when they

are born; children and young people who have conditions affecting their gut, or children with epilepsy.

Pathology

If you like investigation and discovery, and working in laboratories or clinics to find out more about illness and disease, then pathology could be the role for you. There's a bit of 'detective work' involved and it requires a broad and detailed knowledge of medicine to help you come to the right answers.

Physicians

Physicians are doctors based in hospitals who look after people who have been referred to them by GPs and other health professionals. They diagnose what is wrong with a patient by talking to them about their illness, examining them and organising investigations such as x-rays and blood tests. They mainly treat patients with drugs, although they also carry out procedures, for example looking into someone's lungs using a flexible telescope or inserting tiny tubes into the heart to examine how well it is working. As a physician you would see many of your patients in hospital clinics, and also look after those who were more seriously ill on hospital wards.

Psychiatrists

A psychiatrist is a doctor who looks after people with mental illnesses like depression and schizophrenia. As a psychiatrist you would work out what was wrong with patients and how best to treat them to help them get back to living as normal a life as possible. This might be through medicines or offering talking therapies.

Psychiatrists work as part of a team with nurses, therapists and psychologists. They work in hospitals – where they look after patients who have been admitted to hospital to be cared for because they have become very unwell – and in the community, where they see patients who are getting better or have less complex mental health problems. They may also visit patients in their own homes.

Public health specialists

Public health specialists have many different roles. They might help the population become healthier through encouraging more active lifestyles, better diet, or giving up

smoking for example. They are experts in understanding the bigger picture, looking at aspects of people's health across cities and counties or even across the world.

Radiologists

Radiologists care about their image! Or rather they care about the images they handle when investigating what might be the cause of the patient's problem. They look at scans such as x-rays or those taken in big MRI machines to diagnose illness and injuries. Some (interventional) radiologists might carry out surgery based on the insights they have found.

Sexual and reproductive health

These doctors are concerned with caring for the sexual health needs of men and women. There are many different aspects of the role, from helping people who wish to avoid becoming pregnant, to helping patients who might have sexually transmitted infections. Some of these roles might be based in hospital while some will be in community clinics.

Surgeons

Surgeons are doctors who are based in hospitals and do operations. For example, some surgeons might fix a broken bone while other doctors may need to remove a tumour from the brain. There are lots of different types of operations that need doing. Surgeons have a high level of skills developed over years of training. And the operations they do are becoming increasingly clever, often using robots and tiny cameras to avoid having to cut someone open. Surgeons do not just operate. As a surgeon you would also look after patients before and after operations, diagnose problems that might need surgery and use other procedures to make people better.

Other roles

There are many varied careers as a doctor, each with their own responsibilities, skills and rewards. Visit <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles> for more information.

Source: [NHS Talent Academy](#)