

Working as a clinical pharmacologist

New Zealand clinical pharmacologists talk about the reality of working within this field

Why did you choose clinical pharmacology and what do you like most?

Clinical pharmacology bridges the disciplines of medicine, science and research. It is concerned with the scientific method and with evidence-based medicine, and almost always involves some teaching. It also allows contact with other disciplines such as pure pharmacology, medicinal chemistry and pharmacy.

What strengths and abilities make a good clinical pharmacologist?

Those who are interested in pursuing an academic career must be prepared to teach and mentor, and to follow a scientific method. It is also useful to have good writing skills.

As a specialist, can you describe a typical day?

Work as a clinical pharmacologist is very varied. For an academic, a typical day might be replying to emails, organising group teaching sessions, attending formal meetings, dealing with issues of drug information quality control, spending time with trainees (registrars, MSc students, PhD students), writing reports (including minutes of meetings or legal reports) and completing administrative duties and editorial work. You will need to spend time writing papers or books.

What do you think are the future challenges of clinical pharmacology?

Challenges for clinical pharmacology include convincing others of its value and continuing to attract good trainees.

What advice would you give someone thinking about a career in clinical pharmacology?

Clinical pharmacology is very rewarding as a theoretical subject and offers many opportunities for teaching and research. Academic salaries are not vast but there is potential for reasonable earnings within the pharmaceutical industry working for drug companies.

What are future opportunities in clinical pharmacology?

Employment opportunities within New Zealand are reasonable. There is an increasing need for clinical pharmacologists, not only for teaching in universities but also for government committees concerned with drug legislation. The specialty will never be that big in a small country like New Zealand.

What is the work/life balance like?

It is quite easy to secure training posts overseas, and opportunities for travel once you have qualified are as good as other specialties. Taking time out to have children is probably easier than in many

specialties because there is not much on-call work, unless your role combines clinical pharmacology with work as a physician in another specialty.

One clinical pharmacologist said that work as a clinical pharmacologist has caused not impacted much on their family life.

What are the disadvantages of clinical pharmacology?

There are relatively few jobs in clinical pharmacology in New Zealand, and those that do exist are restricted to the main centres. The specialty is not as widely recognised and understood as many others.

Any comments on the current training?

Good experience in general medicine is essential. It is common for trainees to start training under the supervision of another SAC before undertake training in clinical pharmacology as well.