

Working as an endocrinologist



“I chose Endocrinology because I am interested in the effects of hormones and the unique interplay of negative and positive feedback mechanisms that regulate their secretion and function. Endocrinology is an evolving subspecialty in which research and clinical medicine run hand in hand. It is also an area in which physiology, pathology and pharmacology are nicely integrated in the diagnosis and treatment of common diseases. I am also interested in

Diabetes because of the huge impact that it has on people's quality of life and hence our community. It is very pleasing to see how educating diabetic patients and providing them with the skills they need to manage it brings at the end very impressive results”.

Dr Zaven Panossian, Endocrinology registrar
Auckland District Health Board

New Zealand endocrinologist talk about the reality of working within this field

Why did you choose endocrinology and what do you like most?

One endocrinologist said a professor inspired him to pursue this specialty. Endocrinology is continually evolving, so it is an exciting and rewarding area to work in.

What strengths and abilities make a good endocrinologist?

Vigilance and circumspection combined with open-mindedness and flexibility. You must be prepared to monitor and correct, and to learn from colleagues and from the experiences of patients. Endocrinology has always had a strong scientific and research base and offers excellent opportunities for academic and research activities.

As a specialist, can you describe a typical day?

As a hospital specialist, a typical day might include outpatient clinics and telephone and ward consultations. You will treat patients with diabetes, pituitary, bone and thyroid conditions, review results and make diagnoses, and engage in daily case-sharing meetings with colleagues. Some clinicians are heavily involved in fertility and female endocrinology, and others spend more time working with bone disorders. There are also administrative duties. Many endocrinologists in New Zealand cover some general internal medicine as well as their specialty area.

What do you think are the future challenges of endocrinology?

The increasing amount of ambulatory and online care in endocrinology has resulted in much less inpatient care for both endocrinology and diabetes. This trend will continue as well as dispersion of sub-specialists throughout the wider Auckland region. Advances in diagnosis and therapeutics and

increasing speed of patient turnover bring their own challenges. Satisfactory tools for endocrine diagnosis, data analysis and retrieval are still not available in outpatient endocrinology.

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

One endocrinologist said that you should keep up your internal medicine skills, and that it is quite reasonable to complete much of your postgraduate training in internal medicine. It is also useful to spend time working in a diabetes unit. Expect to gain some of your training in a city with a population greater than one million and gain experience in less common conditions. As a consultant, there are many niches in New Zealand in private practice and in small and large district hospitals. A period of basic or applied research is desirable.

What are future opportunities in endocrinology?

There are continuing opportunities as many New Zealand-trained endocrinologists leave to travel overseas to complete further study and the workforce is aging. The subspecialty of private women's endocrinology is increasing so there are excellent opportunities for female specialists. Diabetes remains a Department of Health priority area. However it is possible that opportunities could shrink as a greater proportion of diabetes and thyroid management is moved from the secondary to the primary sector, or become dispersed through endocrine departments throughout the Auckland area.

There are no vacant FTE endocrine positions at Auckland Hospital presently. A number of specialists work partly in adult internal medicine and partly in endocrinology as well as the private sector, and there is also potential for combined positions in paediatrics or foetal-maternal medicine.

Regional development in Auckland with the desire by Waitemata and Counties Manukau to provide strong local endocrine services has opened new opportunities for emerging endocrinologists.

What is the work/life balance like?

Trainees should spend at least some time overseas during training. It is possible to work part time once you are qualified as a specialist. Job-sharing arrangements while raising a family are entirely possible but largely untested.

One endocrinologist said that work has had a positive impact on his family life, and after-hours commitment is not as much as other specialties.

What are the disadvantages of the endocrinology?

General physicians often feel that they can manage cases so patients are not always referred to specialist endocrinologists. But by teaching and sharing knowledge, it is in the interests of the patient to empower both the primary and general physicians in this way.

Any comments on the current training?

Talking with a consultant endocrinologist is a good idea. Basic training should concentrate on internal medicine runs - maternal medicine, cardiology or renal medicine may be useful specialist choices.