

Working as an infectious disease specialist

"I chose infectious diseases because I found it interesting, and I met inspirational clinicians who were trained in infectious diseases during my basic training.

The ability to retain and synthesise information is obviously important to all specialties including infectious diseases. Perhaps the most important abilities are to be able to take a step back and examine a case from a fresh perspective, and adaptability. As a specialty which (at least in New Zealand) primarily provides consultation on patients under the care of other doctors, we are often required to come into a situation where a patient has been in hospital and being investigated and/or treated for some time and may have received various labels. It is vital to be able to review the available information and attempt to come to independent conclusions. In terms of adaptability, the field of infectious diseases is constantly changing with the emergence of antimicrobial resistance, new diseases being found to be related to infections, and the emergence of new or re-emergence of old pathogens."

Dr Stephen McBride, Infectious Diseases and General Physician
Middlemore Hospital

New Zealand infectious disease specialists talk about the reality of working within this field

Why did you choose infectious diseases and what do you like most?

The specialty enables you to deal with a wide range of patients and conditions and offers treatments that are generally very effective.

What strengths and abilities make a good infectious diseases specialist?

An interest in microbiology is essential. There are many different areas in which it is possible to develop particular interest, including infection control, infectious disease epidemiology, tropical diseases or HIV medicine. You need to have good attention to detail as well as very good communication skills and diplomacy skills.

As a specialist, can you describe a typical day?

For a hospital specialist, a typical day would be spent providing a combination of inpatient and outpatient services.

What do you think are the future challenges of infectious diseases?

It is always a challenge to develop knowledge of, and treatments for, new and evolving infections.

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

If you are considering a career in this area it would probably be helpful to discuss the specialty with infectious disease specialists.

What are future opportunities in infectious diseases?

Opportunities in New Zealand are moderately good.

What is the work/life balance like?

Taking time out as a specialist would depend on your ability to negotiate leave with your employer.

One specialist said that the specialty has not impacted negatively on family life.