

## Working as an obstetrician or gynaecologist

New Zealand obstetricians and gynaecologists talk about the reality of working within this field

### **Why did you choose obstetrics and gynaecology (O&G) and what do you like most?**

O&G offers a combination of medicine and surgery, with opportunities to subspecialise in diverse areas. Obstetrics is a practical specialty that deals with women who (for the most part) are young and fit, during what is usually a happy life event. For these reasons it can be very satisfying. Gynaecology also deals mainly with young or middle aged women who tend to be otherwise healthy. Gynaecologists see a wide range of problems, most of which can be treated successfully.

### **What strengths and abilities make a good obstetrician?**

Effective communication skills with an ability to listen to and empathise with women are vital since there is a high degree of patient contact. It is also important to be able to remain calm and act decisively in emergency situations. Good hand/eye co-ordination skills are necessary. While you are training and undertaking call work you need to be well-organised and able to prioritise your workload.

### **As a specialist, can you describe a typical day?**

A daily schedule can vary enormously, depending on the type of specialist practice and the number of hours worked. Full time hospital specialists usually spend 7/10 of their time in contact with patients (including clinics, operating lists and fixed on-call sessions) and 3/10 devoted to administration, CME and audits.

### **What do you think are the future challenges of O&G?**

There are many ethical issues to be faced in a wide range of areas such as management of unwanted pregnancies, genetic screening, assisted reproductive technology, management of very pre-term labour and delivery and care of the neonate. In New Zealand obstetrics, there is concerns about the rising caesarean section rate and medico-legal pressures. The relationship between independent midwifery services and specialists also presents an ongoing challenge. Staffing of hospitals in the public sector is an issue that needs addressing, since there is a shortage of middle grade staff. It will also be important to maintain the correct balance between training and service for registrars.

### **What advice would you give someone thinking about a career in O&G?**

It is recommended that you should undertake a six-month run as a house officer if you are interested in pursuing this specialty. It is possible to complete a diploma in O&G at National women's hospital. While this is not a prerequisite for entry into the training programme, it may be worthwhile considering if you are undecided about the direction of your career.

**What are future opportunities in O&G?**

O&G opportunities depend on the type of practice and the location. Employment prospects are particularly good in provincial centres, and it is likely that the number of full time hospital posts in Auckland will increase over the next few years. Gynaecology referrals in private practice tend to be directed to female specialists.

**What is the work/life balance like?**

Overseas work is strongly encouraged during training or the post-membership years to provide greater breadth and depth of experience. Having children during the first four years of training would be difficult - specialists suggest that you would require a live-in nanny or a high level of support from a spouse. Ideally you should complete the exams before having children, as it is relatively easy to carry out the two post-membership years later if necessary (you have five years to complete this work).

During training you need to be prepared to travel, which could affect family life. One specialist said that the impact on family is significant and that you need to be well-organised to maximise quality time at home. Private practice usually entails a considerable amount of paperwork and hours that are very long.

**What are the disadvantages of O&G?**

Complaints and medico-legal issues can happen in all fields of medicine, and because of the nature of the work, obstetrics and gynaecology is prone to receive its share of these. Most complaints result from communication problems rather than specific negligence.

**Any comments on the current training?**

The course is said to be well-structured, with excellent teaching in the training programme. Trainees recommend that you consider attempting the membership exam at the beginning of the fourth year of training so that you can re-sit at the end of the year if necessary.