

# Working as a rheumatologist

## New Zealand rheumatologists talk about the reality of working within this field

### **Why did you choose rheumatology and what do you like most?**

One rheumatologist said that immunology is an area that particularly interests her, and that this is expressed clinically in various rheumatic syndromes. The specialty is an exciting and progressive field, with new biological therapies likely to have a major impact on disease management in the near future.

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

You need to possess strong clinical ability since patients may present with complex histories and a multitude of physical signs and symptoms. Skill and empathy are required for identifying and managing pain syndromes in particular. You also need to have some level of technical skill for performing procedures such as joint injections.

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

For a hospital-based specialist a typical day would involve a morning outpatient clinic with associated dictation and administration. The rest of the day might be spent on a combination of ward rounds, consultation, teaching and research.

### **What do you think are the future challenges of rheumatology?**

The increasing use of biological agents in treatments requires that specialists update their knowledge of underlying disease mechanisms on a regular basis.

### **What advice would you give someone thinking about a career in rheumatology?**

A strong interest in general medicine is necessary and an interest in immunology or pain medicine (neurophysiology) is helpful.

### **What are future opportunities in rheumatology?**

Many opportunities exist in this field. Although there is limited scope in the public sector for practice solely devoted to rheumatology, there are many combined rheumatology and general physician positions. Patients being seen in the private sector are increasing.

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

One female specialist said that it is definitely possible to manage raising a family after completion of training in rheumatology - there is very little on-call work and part time private practice is an option.

While employment arrangements may be flexible, there will inevitably be some degree of impact on family life since hours of work can be long and there are occasionally on-call responsibilities.

**What are the disadvantages of rheumatology?**

Rheumatology offers little exposure to acute general medicine (unless you hold a combined position) and the financial rewards are not as great as for procedural specialties.

**Any comments on the current training?**

The advanced training programme in rheumatology recognises that rheumatologists may practice in many ways in New Zealand. Some may hold 'pure' rheumatology positions within large metropolitan hospitals or academic institutions or in private practice, while others will work in a more general setting. To an extent, these needs can be catered for in the structure of the training programme.