

Information Interviews

One of the ways that can help you to clarify what it's like to work in a specialty is to speak to doctors working in that specialty area. An information interview is an easy way to research specialty-specific information.

When speaking with doctors regarding their specialty, you may wish to consider asking some of the questions which will provide you with information which should help you in deciding about that particular specialty. Note that some questions might be targeted or specific whereas others are more open-ended providing a chance for open discussion about the specialty.

Know What You Want to Accomplish

The primary objectives of informational interviewing are to:

- Investigate a specific career specialty.
- Assist in narrowing options.
- Obtain advice on where you might fit in.
- Learn the jargon and important issues in the field.
- Broaden your network of contacts for future reference.
- Create a strategy for entering your field of interest.

Conducting the Information Interview

Before the interview:

- Set up the interview with the person by being specific over how long you expect the interview to last and also consider sending them a copy of your questions and CV beforehand if appropriate.
- Record the questions that you wish to ask.
- If possible, learn something about the person with whom you will be interviewing.

During the interview:

- State your purpose and why you are talking with this particular person.
- Be prepared to initiate the conversation, since you are the interviewer.
- Adhere to the original time request.
- Ask for (if appropriate) referrals to other appropriate individuals in the field.
- Don't try to use the time as an impromptu way of getting feedback on your CV. If you would like CV feedback, make sure the person knows this in advance

After the interview:

- Send a thank-you note /email. Let people know how you get on if they are interested in your progress; keep them informed if relevant
- Keep the door open for future contacts with this person if appropriate.
- Evaluate your style of interviewing. What could you have done better? Use what you have learned when you conduct your next interview.
- Evaluate the information you received. How does it relate to your plans?

Possible Questions to ask about Specific Specialty Training

Job Description

- What are the various components of the clinical training?
- What are the usual clinical rotations like in the first couple of years?
- What is the usual profile of patients seen?
- How will my level of responsibility be likely to change in the future?
- What is the proportion of fixed clinical sessions and on call duties?
- What is the opportunity for study and study leave?
- What is the nature of the supervision?
- How is the team structured in this specialty?

Personal Qualities

- What type of people does the specialty attract?
- Do you think there are particular qualities which distinguish those who progress in this field from those who do not?

Educational and Clinical Experience that may be useful

- Are there any particular things I could do which will maximise my chances of entering this area?
- Are there any specific rotations in the foundation programme or work tasters that I should consider?

Entry and Competitiveness

- How available are training posts within this specialty?
- What is the typical competition ratio?
- Is there likely to be active recruitment to the specialty?
- In what settings will there be openings when training is complete?
- Which professional journals and organizations would you recommend that would help me learn more about this field?

Training and Future of the Specialty

- What is the length of training?
- What are the differences between training programmes within the same specialty?
- Is there anyone else that I should talk to for information on this area?
- What is the potential for further training e.g. requirements for subspecialty training?
- What are the research opportunities?
- What trends might you predict for this specialty?

Effects on Lifestyle

- What is the earning potential?
- How easy is it to train flexibly?
- What obligation does your work put on you outside the work week?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of work hours, study, holidays etc.?