

A Day in the Life...

Tessa Davis, ST4 Paediatrics Trainee, on maternity leave and flexible training

I am a paediatric ST4 trainee and am currently on maternity leave. This is my second time on maternity leave and following the birth of my first child I returned to work as a flexible trainee. With more and more women working in medicine, maternity leave is an issue affecting lots of people, including colleagues at work, employers and patients.

Working when Pregnant

Being pregnant and working in a hospital environment can be difficult, even when you have an 'easy' pregnancy which is free from complications. People often have problems with morning sickness during ward rounds and later on difficulty standing for long periods or working for long shifts. As well as looking after yourself, you do also have to consider your colleagues too. The key is to communicate with your colleagues and be open about any issues you may have – most colleagues won't mind covering for you if you're feeling unwell and need to sit down for half an hour, but they might start to get a bit annoyed if you keep disappearing without explanation!

Towards the end of my pregnancy I stopped doing 13 hour shifts as it was too difficult for me to keep going for this long. I informed my employers and they were very accommodating in getting cover for this. During my previous pregnancy my employers were less helpful in this regard and it is important to seek advice if you feel that you are being treated unfairly.

Preparing for Maternity Leave

Taking up to a year out of work is a huge change in lifestyle and a break in your career pathway and so it is important to try and get things in order before you go on leave. As far as your training is concerned, this may include getting assessments completed before going on leave – e.g. eSPRATS, DOPS and mini-Cexs. It will be one less thing to worry about when you do return to work.

As a registrar, patient follow up is usually carried out by the consultants, so, just the same as when you move onto a new post you should try and chase up any outstanding reports/results and make sure any patients you have been responsible for will be handed over to someone else.

Making the Most of Maternity Leave

I used the time before the baby was born to try and organise my portfolio and make a plan for things to do during my maternity leave.

My interest is in child protection and I'm in the middle of a Masters in Forensic Science and Medicine, so I have used my maternity leave to try and work on this. I'm also trying to organise some child protection teaching for registrars in Manchester.

Mainly I've been using the time to get to know my new baby and enjoy our expanding family.

Preparing for Return to Work

Trainees do have the option of 'Keep In Touch Days' where you can work for ten days for your employers (during your maternity leave) without compromising your maternity leave pay. The purpose of this is to try and keep you up to date with clinical practice and any changes since you have been off work. I am considering using these days closer to my return to work time as it may make my first official day back a little less stressful!

Returning as a Flexible Trainee

Working as a flexible trainee can be difficult – it is important to make yourself an integral part of the team, and this is more difficult when you are only there for part of the week. But, if you are reliable and you maximise the time when you are working, then you should be as valued a member of the team as any of the full-time doctors.