TRAINING IN PAIN MEDICINE

“In summary, Pain Medicine training is undertaken after commencement of anaesthetic training. There is a very specific training programme which can guide interested anaesthetists to their desired training level. Pain Medicine leads to interaction with varied patients from many different specialties and from both primary and secondary care. These patients may have seen many doctors prior to consultation and can be challenging but ultimately, the work can also be very rewarding.”

Frequently Asked Questions

Q Is there any point in doing higher training if I do not want to become a Chronic Pain Specialist?
A Some anaesthetists may choose to develop an interest in managing Acute Pain. Higher training will enable those anaesthetists to develop skills in managing acute pain including acute pain that is associated with chronic and cancer pain.

Q Would undertaking higher and advanced training in Pain Medicine delay obtaining a Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) in Anaesthesia?
A No. This is still compatible with obtaining a Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) in Anaesthesia in the normal amount of time.

Q Can I do my Advanced Pain Medicine Training abroad?
A Yes. This would be considered out-of-programme experience and the proposed year would require prospective approval from the Faculty of Pain Medicine.
Training in Pain Medicine

What is Pain Medicine?

Pain Medicine involves the management of patients who have acute, chronic or cancer pain. All trained doctors will have some degree of knowledge of painful conditions and their treatments. Doctors who have been specifically trained in Pain Medicine however, have been trained to manage all types of difficult pain caused by a range of conditions.

What does Pain Medicine entail?

Currently in the UK, specialist Pain Medicine training is undertaken by anaesthetists. This is traditionally because anaesthetists were trained to perform complicated local anaesthetic nerve blocks. Modern Pain Medicine practice has become much broader and Consultant Anaesthetists who practise Pain Medicine will now use a range of techniques to manage pain including analgesic drugs, physical methods such as acupuncture, local anaesthetic blocks including epidural and spinal facet joint injections and psychological approaches such as pain management programmes. Some use very specialised techniques such as spinal cord stimulation. There is a huge emphasis on multidisciplinary team working and Pain Specialists will usually work with nurses, physiotherapists and psychologists in order to deliver an optimal package of care.

Typical weekly commitments for Pain Consultants can include outpatient pain clinics, acute pain ward rounds, theatre sessions for local anaesthetic blocks and multidisciplinary meetings. Some subspecialists undertake work in areas such as paediatric pain medicine, pain and addiction and interventional methods. Pain Consultants usually also continue to work as Anaesthetists although a few practise solely Pain Medicine.

The pathway of training

Training in Pain Medicine is supervised by the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) of the Royal College of Anaesthetists. Pain Medicine is a key component of training in the specialty of anaesthesia and all trainees are required to undertake basic and intermediate training in Pain Medicine in order to gain an intermediate level training certificate in anaesthesia at the end of their ST5 year. Those who develop an interest in Pain Medicine may wish to pursue this during their anaesthesia training by undertaking either higher training and/or advanced training.

Basic training: This is a mandatory unit of anaesthesia training to be completed between ST1-ST2 years. This should be ideally delivered as a dedicated block of training. At this level, a trainee would be expected to gain knowledge of both acute and chronic pain and of the anatomy, physiology and pharmacology that underpins management. Their developing skills would focus on managing acute pain.
Intermediate training: This is one of 8 essential units of anaesthesia training during ST3-ST5 years which should be completed before progressing to higher/advanced training. These units should last between 4-12 weeks with a minimum of twenty half day theatre/clinic sessions. This training should enable anaesthetists to become competent in acute pain management as well as developing skills in basic management of chronic and cancer pain.

Higher training: This is an optional 3 month continuous block of pain medicine between ST5-ST7 years. It represents a progression from basic/intermediate training to include the treatment of acute, chronic and cancer pain. It is essential for all those who wish to progress to advanced training. The Royal College of Anaesthetists and the FPM also recommend that these higher competencies are the minimum requirement for those trainees who wish to consider a future post as a Consultant Anaesthetist with an interest in Acute Pain Medicine.

Advanced training: This training is considered essential for those who wish to practise as independent Chronic Pain Medicine Consultants. The FPM would also recommend advanced training for those who are appointed as lead clinicians of Acute Pain Services. This is a 12 month continuous block of training which would normally be undertaken in ST6-ST7 years in order to develop mastery of specialist pain management. This training would include acute, chronic and cancer pain training in a designated multidisciplinary specialist centre(s). Training would typically involve attendance at acute pain ward rounds, chronic pain clinics and theatre sessions to learn local anaesthetic blocks and other interventions. An advanced trainee may typically manage their own weekly pain clinic with supervision. Within these 12 months, trainees may choose to dedicate 3 months to subspecialty training such paediatric pain medicine, cancer pain or spinal cord stimulation. Trainees would also be expected to learn skills from their multidisciplinary colleagues in the pain team to ensure appropriate referral of patients.

Completing training and gaining a fellowship
All levels of training have specific requirements according to the Curriculum for Training in Anaesthesia. Currently, successful completion of advanced training and associated assessments leading to the award of a CCT will enable someone to practise Pain Medicine independently as a Consultant. At the time of writing, a portfolio of pain-related activities such as audit, research and teaching may be submitted to the FPM, and this together with advanced training completion may lead to award of the Fellowship of the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Royal College of Anaesthetists (FFPMRCA). In time, it is expected that a formal Faculty Fellowship entry exam will be required for this award.
In summary, Pain Medicine training is undertaken after commencement of anaesthetic training. There is a very specific training programme which can guide interested anaesthetists to their desired training level. Pain Medicine leads to interaction with varied patients from many different specialties and from both primary and secondary care. These patients may have seen many doctors prior to consultation and can be challenging but ultimately, the work can also be very rewarding.

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