

Introducing a Career in Tropical Medicine

Ms Jennifer Khan-Perez, Dr Katherine Ajdukiewicz

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The World Journal of Medical Education and Research (WJMER) is the online publication of the Doctors Academy Group of Educational Establishments. Published on a quarterly basis, it's aim is to promote academia and research amongst all members of the multi-disciplinary healthcare team including doctors, dentists, scientists, and students of these specialties from all parts of the world. The principal objective of this journal is to encourage the aforementioned from developing countries in particular to publish their work. The journal intends to promote the healthy transfer of knowledge, opinions and expertise between those who have the benefit of cutting edge technology and those who need to innovate within their resource constraints. It is our hope that this will help to develop medical knowledge and to provide optimal clinical care in different settings all over the world. We envisage an incessant stream of information will flow along the channels that WJMER will create and that a surfeit of ideas will be gleaned from this process. We look forward to sharing these experiences with our readers in our subsequent editions. We are honoured to welcome you to WJMER.



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Ms Jennifer Khan-Perez

Fourth-year medical student
The University of Manchester
Salford Royal NHS Trust

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Katherine Ajdukiewicz: katherine.ajdukiewicz@pat.nhs.uk

Dr Katherine Ajdukiewicz MBChB, FRCP, DTMH

Consultant in Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine,
Honorary Senior Lecturer Manchester Medical School
The University of Manchester, Manchester Academic
Health Science Centre, Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS
Trust North Manchester General Hospital

Introducing Tropical Medicine

With worldwide pandemics of tuberculosis (TB), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), malaria, emerging infections such as SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome caused by SARS coronavirus), and pandemic influenza, and the complexities of increasing drug-resistance such as extended drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDRTB), Tropical Medicine is a challenging, contemporary and exciting specialty. Tropical Medicine encompasses all organ systems of the human body and requires input from a multitude of medical specialities in particular neurology, dermatology, gastroenterology and respiratory medicine.

Tropical Medicine is a sub-speciality of infectious diseases. There are currently four tropical medicine centres recognised for training in the UK which include Northwick Park and the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London, Birmingham Heartlands Hospital and Liverpool Royal Hospital. Training in Tropical Medicine may be as a sole specialty or combined with General Internal Medicine, Microbiology or Infectious Diseases. Experience abroad is required for training (12 months), and there is the potential to subsequently pursue a career overseas. A majority of tropical disease specialists in the UK (over 75%) work in academic medicine.

Life as a Tropical Medicine Consultant

Tropical medicine is actually, strictly speaking, a misnomer for the speciality encompasses both tropical and general infectious diseases. It includes management of both community and hospital acquired infections on the ward and in high dependency/intensive care settings. There is also the challenge of managing infections which can cause immunocompromised states i.e., HIV which can lead onto AIDS and subsequently, render them more prone to acquiring opportunistic infections. Expertise is needed in optimizing antimicrobial therapy and meeting the challenges posed by the antimicrobial arms race which is becoming an inexorably complex issue due to mass migration and availability of therapeutic agents.

As a consultant in tropical medicine, a typical week is likely to involve clinical work in both an in-patient and

out-patient setting as well as conducting research and other academic pursuits. The workload often includes pre-travel clinic, often with complex patients with multiple co-morbidities; management of patients with exotic infections including schistosomiasis, tuberculosis, leprosy, hydatid disease.

The variety of cases that present to the specialist in tropical medicine is truly wide-ranging from on-call work which may consist of managing pyrexia in someone returning from a country where viral haemorrhagic fever or malaria enter the differential diagnosis to likely Pneumocystis pneumonia in someone requiring ICU.

As in other areas of medicine, the tropical medicine consultant adopts a holistic approach to treating patients with infectious diseases by working in a multi-disciplinary team, particularly in the context of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV – they are tasked to conduct contact tracing, and facilitate adherence of therapy. There is close liaison with public health colleagues particularly when notifiable diseases such as malaria, cholera and tuberculosis are diagnosed.

Training

Career prospects are variable within Tropical Medicine. As outlined above, there are only four centres accredited for Tropical Medicine training in the UK and therefore competition for training positions is fierce. There are few consultant positions available although Infectious Diseases units also look after tropical/travel related infections.

Tropical medicine involves straddling the academic and clinical realms and therefore medics who aim to reconcile the seemingly disparate dimensions in medicine need look no further and this, no doubt contributes towards it allure. Many other specialities are integrated into tropical medicine including virology, clinical pharmacology, public health, epidemiology, vaccines and genitourinary medicine; enhanced training in these areas is required. The variability in career structure makes allowance for greater flexibility in future career pathways and cultivating areas of interest. It is noteworthy that for those who have monetary incentives, tropical medicine

may not appeal as there is very little opportunity in the private sector.

Facts and Figures

Tropical Medicine encompasses several subspecialties including Medical Microbiology, Tropical Medicine and Virology. Posts for training places in Infectious diseases currently include one place in each of East Midlands (North), East of England, Oxford and West Midlands, with two places in the East Midlands (South).

Completion of Core Medical Training (CMT) or Acute Care Common Stem (ACCS) with acquisition of full MRCP (UK) is required before entry into Specialty Training at ST3.

The Diploma in Tropical Medicine & Hygiene (DTM&H) is a three month full-time course for qualified doctors recommended for those who wish to specialise in tropical diseases. The DTM&H has clinical, practical and public health components with a strong epidemiological focus. It is run once or twice a year in two main UK institutions (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine). Courses are highly subscribed with limited places and often have an international student population. Most doctors undertaking this course do so with the intention of working abroad in poorly-resourced areas, or have an

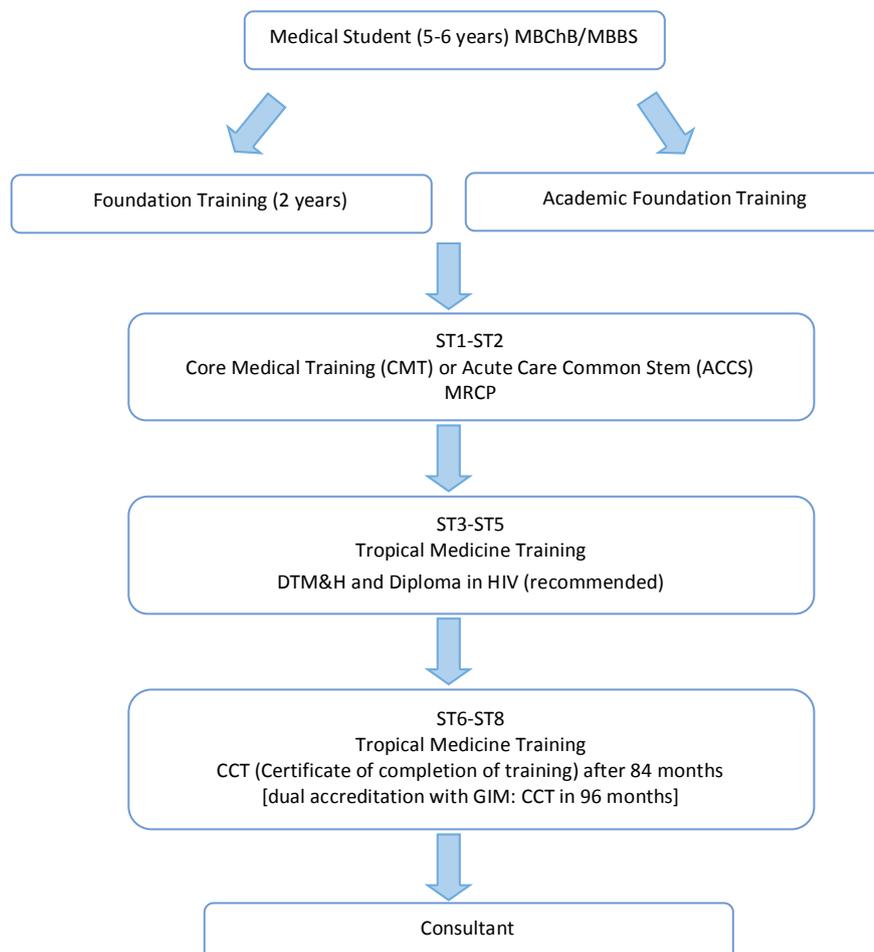
interest in working in travel clinics in the UK.

The Diploma in HIV Medicine (Dip HIV Med) run by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries London is also recommended for training in Tropical Medicine. The syllabus covers core knowledge in HIV expected for registered medical practitioners who have regular clinical contact with HIV patients.

The Future

Tropical Medicine embraces a multi-faceted, worldwide paradigm, which includes under its remit infectious diseases in both developing and the developed health economies. It is bewildering to appreciate that only decades ago, literally millions of people were dying from preventable infectious diseases. Since the advent of vaccinations, certain diseases were completely eradicated. So what does the future hold? Perhaps that is to be determined by the vision of those who occupy the ranks of tropical medicine.....

"Adding nothing superfluous, and omitting nothing necessary"
– Graham Green, Stanboul Train



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