

What specialty should I pick?

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Job applications are fast approaching for those without a job for next year. Therefore, we thought we'd take the opportunity to point out this invaluable resource. It was developed by NSW Health for guiding candidates in their choice of future specialty.

NSW Health fact sheets

NSW Health has produced a series of 2-page fact sheets covering every medical specialty. (From well-known specialties such as cardiology and cardiothoracic surgery to the less well-known specialties such as chemical pathology and medical administration.) Each fact sheet has information on key aspects of the specialty including:

- Whether a specialty is under or oversubscribed.
- Average number of hours per week worked.
- Average age of consultants.
- Proportion of female consultants.
- Retirement intentions of consultants within the next 2, 5 and 9 years.
- Distribution of consultants between metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

To find out more about the NSW Health factsheets you can visit [NSW Health – Medical Career Planning](#). In addition, we also recommended the following resources:

- **Map my Career.** This is an excellent tool which allows you to compare different specialties based on the data from the NSW Health factsheets.
- **Doctors GPS guide,** Health Education and Training Institute.
- **“How to Choose a Specialty”,** Royal College of Physicians.
- **“Know what makes you Tick - The key to specialty selection”** Sedgwick, E. Sept 2012, BMJ Careers.
- **Onthejobs Blog #1 What Specialty?** Pal, A. Aug 2014, [onthewards.org](#).

Flowcharts to help you make a decision

If all of the above fails, there are a range of flowcharts online to speed up your decision making.

- Medical decision tree
- Book of Joe
- Which medical specialty is right for you?

My tips for how to pick a specialty

Here are some ideas about picking a specialty that I've picked up during my time in medicine

You'll hopefully be practicing medicine for over 30 years. Hence, make sure you pick a specialty you have an interest in and can see yourself enjoying for a long time! For example, ask yourself: *"Would I be happy to be in the operating theatre for most of my life?"* *"Would I be happy doing angiograms for the rest of my life?"* *"Would I be happy to be anaesthetising patients for the rest of my life?"*

Don't just base your decision on prestige and money

Picking a specialty based on employment prospects is pragmatic but problematic (see point 1). For example, I'm going to do general practice because I'm going to get a job. However, doing a job that you have no interest in is completely unsustainable in medicine and will likely lead to burnout.

Some specialties have more "prestige" attached to them. Try to ignore this aspect and focus on the type of work and type of medicine you think you might enjoy. If you find this affecting you, talk to some people outside of medicine. You can see their eyes glaze over as you try to explain why one specialty is more important than another.

Similarly, some specialties will be better remunerated than others. This is a reflection of the way procedures and services are handled in the healthcare economy, not of the worth of the practitioner. For instance, a cardiothoracic surgeon is not "more important" or "more valuable" than a psychiatrist because they get paid more.

It's okay to be unsure

It's OK to be unsure. There are many people who are unsure of their career decision. (Even registrars and consultants!) Additionally, it is more than likely that you could do more than one specialty. Don't base your decision on one poor term or interaction with a registrar or consultant from the field you're interested in. If you are interested in a field, stay interested.

Talk to people in the field you're interested in and ask them about remuneration, employment prospects, hours, and enjoyment. Get your own information and don't rely on hearsay or gossip.

Good luck!

Related Blogs

- [Onthejobs Blog #1 - What Specialty?](#)

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