Wondering when to go and work abroad – here are some issues to consider at all times of your careers

This document has been put together by a group of careers advisers who work with medical students and junior doctors. With special thanks to Jason Yarrow for compiling the document from our thoughts. If you are considering going abroad to work this document may help you to think about the various issues involved. The following is intended to act as an aide memoir and give ideas for considerations that should be fully explored by those that are thinking of taking time to travel, work or train abroad. This is not intended to provide a series of definitive of answers but to enable you to explore options and to seek relevant and current advice as to working and training abroad.

The decision to undertake time abroad during a medical career is one which should be fully considered and implications of taking this course of action need to be carefully thought through.
It is becoming apparent that with the new generation of doctors and the increased awareness of opportunity afforded by technological developments and access to information that more and more Medical Students and Doctors are considering this as an option.

A medical career affords a series of stages that maybe suited to taking time out to travel and work abroad, and it may be beneficial for trainees to consider when is the most appropriate time to go. Ultimately it is the individuals' decision but they should be in a position to make a well informed decision about this course of action and how it could be both potentially beneficial as well as raising awareness of how taking time to go abroad could impact on their UK training.

Essentially the decision to go abroad and when belongs with the individual. Doctors often seek (particularly in the junior years) validation that it will be ok to go abroad and that there is formal agreement it is the thing to do. This is not the case and the individual needs to be clear of their motivations and reasons for going.

So things to consider if you go to work abroad:

- **After Medical School**
- **During or after Foundation Training**
- **After core training and prior to applying for core specialty training HST**
- **During Specialty Training**
- **After Speciality Training (award of certificate of completion of training- CCT)**

AFTER MEDICAL SCHOOL

Why go?

- To return to home country to train if an overseas student
- Never had a GAP year and feel now is the time
- May not have secured a Foundation place
- Gain more experience before applying to Foundation
- Study a further qualification to enhance CV
- Are having doubts about medicine as a career
- Have fewer commitments at this stage of career
- **What to consider?**
- What is the currency of your Degree? Will you have to undertake clinical skills assessment for foundation if taking time out? See person specs for Foundation.
- You will not be able to defer your Foundation place (in most cases)
- Competition into Foundation. What will the implications be if there is oversubscription? Could be even more competition a year later
- What will the process be for entry into Foundation on your return? Return for SJT
- Would you gain more by delaying going overseas until you have full registration – you maybe more useful and gain more valuable experience for your CV
- What will you being for the time out?
- **How long to go?**
- Currency of medical degree. Clinical skills assessment prior to entering Foundation if go away for more than 2 years. This may change so need to keep up to date with UKFPO.
- Changes in numbers of places on foundation. What will the position be like if time is taken out after medical school? Will there be even more competition into Foundation.
- Process for entry 2013 may change with MSC (Medical Schools Council) work on selection into Foundation.
- Will those taking time out after medical school be less driven on return to UK.
- **How to plan?**

- Make use of contacts within Careers service.
- Network with contacts at the medical school – Clinical/Educational supervisors. College tutors.
- Keep contact with medical school, UKFPO and medical schools council – changes to Foundation could impact your decision to go abroad
- Maintaining links with referees for application to Foundation. Seek their views on taking time out after medical school.

Where to go?

- Developed versus developing countries
- What will you be able to usefully do to enhance your career prospects?
- Developed if you are considering further study / shadowing specialists
- Developing may give you more exposure to clinical situations than developed

Returning to the UK

- Be aware of timelines for application to Foundation. Academic an earlier application than standard Foundation.
- You may have to return for interview or for entry 2013 situational judgement tests.
- If you have been away for more than 2 years you may have to sit a clinical skills assessment.
- Keep a portfolio of your time abroad to show career thinking and skills development. Be reflective in what you have learned while away and how this will inform your future career planning

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AFTER OR DURING FOUNDATION SCHOOL

Why go?

- Broader experience
- Confirm or test a career idea prior to applying for specialty training.
- Delay career choice
- Develop special interest – particularity for very competitive specialty training programme (Tropical medicine / Public Health)
- Return home after gaining full GMC registration.
- Take a break with completion of FACD (Foundation Achievement Competency Document)

What to consider?

- During (F2 abroad)
- Will the Foundation school allow F2 abroad? Variation between schools in the numbers, if any allowed.
- You have to organise it yourself – a lot of work and you are settling into your job as a doctor. STFS (South Thames Foundation School) 2011 – 40 interested F1 Drs. 6 applied and 3 were approved.
- Will you have to give up your confirmed F2 post if you go abroad – see local Foundation School policy.
- Consider medical insurance for going overseas
- Maintain links with Foundation School while overseas is very important
- You will have to be clear the Foundation School is happy for your time abroad to be counted to F1 competencies. This can be hard due to QA of the programme that you are intending on going to.
- What are the reasons for wanting to go during Foundation
- If F2 taken abroad – then applications for specialty will open during this time. What are the implications for completing applications
- Returning for interviews and selection centre
- After Foundation (completion of FACD)
- Why?
- LAT (Locum Appointed to Training)/LAS (Locum Appointed to Service) posts in UK can give you broader experience help confirm career thoughts.
- Overseas posts likely to be filling service gaps and could involve long hours/ on call etc.
- Need to be aware of the specialty recruitment timelines and what is required. Applying from overseas will take a bit of planning.
- Will have to return for interviews and selection centres

- What will the situation look like in terms of number of specialty training places if going abroad delays entry by 1 year. E.g. possible cuts in surgical training numbers. If surgery was an area of interest will going overseas after Foundation only make it more difficult to get a job on return. Work force planning and CfWI (Centre for Workforce Intelligence) an important aspect to consider.
- What will they be doing for the year. How can this positively be used to enhance prospects on return?
- Need to keep a portfolio of activities with reflection on practice etc.
- What is the consultants view on taking time out after Foundation **–** no right or wrong answer. They all have different options. The individual has to make the decision and be CLEAR as to why and talk confidently about this at interview/selection panel.
- Will have full Registration so perhaps a good time to go **–** care for how long. Person specifications for training pathways need to be reviewed.
- Would there be more value in going after 4 years of Postgraduate Training. E.g. VSO, NGOs like this experience.
- Entry to specialty training cannot be deferred for 1 year.
- What are the implications for breaking continuous service with the NHS. Will impact on pension in the future.
- Unlikely that this time out will count toward any future training in the NHS. LAT posts can count in SOME circumstances

How Long to go?

- FACD has a time bound validity (3 years currently but person specifications should be checked for the current allowable timeframes)
- Person specifications also clear that 18 months experience or less **–** not including the Foundation Programme modules are required for enter into CT1/ST1. Person specifications should be checked for any changes to this requirement.
- License to practice via GMC (General Medical Council) should also be considered.

How to plan?

- Build links with Educational Supervisor/Clinical Tutors
- **Seek out F2's that have been abroad or current F2's who are planning to take a year** out after completion of foundation
- Visit BMJ Careers Fairs or other local events
- Will take time to organise **–** visa requirements etc.
- Be aware of specific local policy **–** if planning to try for F2 abroad this will likely be early into your F1 year
- Seek advice from seniors **–** be aware of medical insurance issue
- BMA has valuable information on working / training abroad
- Review www.prospects.ac.uk for country profiles to find out more on countries of interest
- Keep correspondence with contacts overseas and all associated paper work

- Be aware of what information is required for application into specialty on your return. If you are planning to apply from overseas you need to have to hand basic information and dates etc. to complete the forms correctly.

Where to go?

- Developed world – English speaking countries may be easier to assimilate into to
- Developing – potential to get more involved in situations experiences other countries may not allow

Returning to UK

- Be aware of specialty / GP application timelines
- How long have you been away? – review relevant person specs, license to practice issues, GMC regulations. A period of clinical skills refreshment maybe required if you have been away for a long period of time
- Re-connect with UK based colleagues networks
- Consider your time abroad and how it will enhance your training prospects – portfolio development etc.

AFTER CORE TRAINING (CMT/CST/CPT) PRIOR TO APPLYING TO HIGHER SPECIALTY TRAINING (HST)

Why Go?

- Natural break before applying to HST
- Arguably is a more valuable time to go. Both to the individual in terms of what they can do, and also to the host country in the good that they can do.
- Allows a break to consider higher level career thoughts or confirm decision for plans in HST
- Could be the first opportunity to do something they have always wanted to do.
- Allow more experience to be gained in area of interest. Person specifications for HST have requirement of at least 24 months. Different from the specifications for Core training
- Could act as a stop gap if there is oversupply of core trainees for the numbers of actual HST posts. Maybe unsuccessful in gaining a HST post after Core training and can use time abroad to broaden experience / enhance CV
- Personal considerations around work life balance / family may be considered at this time

What to consider?

- Reason for break? – How will it enhance your career in the future?
- What impact would a break have on entry to HST
- What implications will a break have to continuous service and associated pension reduction.
- Applying / interviews for HST if away from the UK
- Need to keep abreast of process for HST applications
- What could the likelihood of there be less HST training places a year later if a break is taken
- Seek BMA guidance – National Training Number (NTN implications)
- Could your break be taken as LAT/Las post in UK. LAT MAY count toward CCT (Certificate of Completion of training)
- Need time to organise the break. Visas / local arrangements such as registrations if applicable

How long to go?

- Awareness of timelines for application into HST
- What are the person specification requirements for entry into HST
- Have you got the required College/Faculty membership exams
- 24 months or more experience generally required for entry into HST
- Potential to take up Department of Health volunteering scheme. This will be time bound. 6 – 24 months but MUST return to UK and resume training (some volunteering schemes will count toward training to CCT.

How to plan?

- Use all available networks – senior trainees / Training Programme Directors / College Tutors / Education or Clinical Supervisors
- Review BMJ Careers / BMA sites for hints and tips
- Attend National BMJ Career Fair in London or other events

Where to go?

- Developed v Developing
- DH volunteering scheme (where pension contributions will be covered) is aimed at Developing world
- Developed will have a more modern perhaps similar training regime / environment to UK – advantages re returning to the UK and stepping back into training

Returning to the UK:

Timelines for recruitment

Ensure you have recorded your activities while away – get testimonials from supervisors etc.

Re-connect with networks you have – get the low down on current local hot topic / applications changes etc.

DURING SPECIALTY TRAINING:

Why go?

- Broader more valued experience to travel. More to offer
- Undertake study / research in an area of interest
- Could be part of the training programme offer. A few training pathways have reciprocal links in the developing world
- Could be last opportunity before reaching GP/Consultant grade

- Gain a different experience to make you stand out in consultant interview / applications

What to consider?

Local LTEB/ Deanery arrangements and procedures

- Keep communication channels open. Discuss plans and ideas EARLY with Educational Supervisor
- Review required documentation required and responsibilities on you at a local level to take time out
- What type of break are you considering?
    - OOPT: Out of Programme Training (Can count toward CCT in some cases)
    - OOPR: Out of Programme Research (Can count toward CCT in some cases)
    - OOPE: Out of Programme Experience – gain more clinical experience
    - OOPC: Out of Programme Career break
- Implications on continuous NHS service - pensions
- Would volunteering within the NHS be an option via DH Volunteering programme. This is time bound to 6 – 24 months. Details coming out shortly about this for Doctors.
- Medical insurance
- Define the objectives for going abroad. What will the long term benefit be
- What will the NHS jobs "landscape" look like on your return. Will there be fewer Consultant opportunities in your specialty
- What are the implications for revalidation / license to practice – see GMC for details
- Have professional / college exams been taken and passed for progression
- What will the perceived quality of the out of programme be on your return with those who will be recruiting / interviewing for consultant posts

How long to go?

- Implications on specialty training programme – are you planning on coming back the following year and stepping back into programme? Need to be clear of LOCAL Deanery process for this.
- Will there be a place for you to come back to – need assurance from Deanery that this will be case
- Do you need to re take college exams
- If going for Educational reasons – how long is the course? Will Deanery support an extended period out of programme for this
- What is the GMC guidance on time out of programme

How to plan?

- Research and planning key
- You will be expected to take responsibility for the planning – this will take time
- Discuss with Educational Supervisors / Clinical Tutors / College Tutors / DME etc.
- Review BMA/BMJ/College websites
- Attend BMJ Fairs

Where to go?:

What are your personal motivations / interests?

Developed v Developing

Which will benefit most in career development - will the experience count

Returning to the UK:

Maintain links with home Deanery / DME / Educational Supervisor etc.

AFTER SPECIALTY TRAINING (AWARD OF CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION OF TRAINING – CCT)

Why go?

- Awaiting a consultant post to become vacant – could be a good time to go
- To further enhance CV and area of specialist interest for entry into UK Consultant grade
- Will be very useful to either a developing / developed country at this stage
- Could be a good time to go before settling into a long term consultant career

What to consider?

- Seek advice / information from BMA
- What are implications on break of continuous NHS service
- Have you considered NHS volunteering scheme – details to be announced
- What is the validity of the CCT? Shelf life of the CCT
- Will you need to re skill on return for current advances in your specialty?
- Loss of informal networks re consultant job opportunities – right place at right time effect.
- Preparing / researching for consultant applications / interviews maybe problematic out with the UK
- Consideration around license to practice / clinical skills etc. Seek current advice from GMC.
- Keeping abreast of current hot topics in UK vital for consultant applications etc. – can you easily do this from abroad?
- Do you have the requisite language skills if a non-English speaking country
- What are the local requirements re any registrations etc. these take time to research and apply for
- What is the real reason for going? – are you dissatisfied with career in UK?

How long to go?

- What is the situation at home re consultant posts? When are they likely to come up? – Informal networks can give a clue as to potential opportunity.
- If NHS volunteering scheme – 6 – 24 months with requirement to return to UK to resume career (payment of NHS pension contributions will be made in the scheme)

- Revalidation considerations as well as other GMC related statutory requirements.
- What are the person specification for consultant posts looking for in terms of current experience. Will overseas experience (for too long) count against you?

How to plan?

- Use current networks. Have any of your contacts done similar.
- DME/Educational Supervisor/ Royal College tutor rich sources of information
- BMA/BMJ Careers sites
- BMJ Careers Fairs and Royal College websites a good source of information
- Do you have all the membership exams you require for entry into specialist roles
- Will take a lot of planning – how will you use your time away to enhance your career prospects. Keep records etc. of your activities and get this validated by the DME or equivalent where you have been working

Where to go?

- Developed versus developing
- Volunteering scheme TBA focus on developing world
- What are your language skills like – sufficient for non-English speaking areas?
- What are you wanting to experience – modern techniques or more rudimentary skills
- Consider the disaster emergency register for support in regions hit by earthquake, tsunami etc.

Returning to UK?

- What is the requirement to re skill for practice in a UK setting
- Have you kept up to date with current developments in the UK
- Re connect with old networks and Royal Colleges etc.

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