



Some comments from clinicians

Q. Why did you choose this specialty and what do you most like about it?

A. Sexual health medicine is challenging, interesting and very rewarding. The work usually involves young adults who are otherwise healthy and in most cases it is possible to make a tangible difference to patients' lives. Since sexual health is a developing area of medicine, there are excellent opportunities for research.

Q. What does a daily schedule look like?

A. A typical day might include consultations with inpatients and primary care patients who present with a wide range of complaints, combined with teaching and administrative duties. Clinics are often based in various locations so the role can involve a significant amount of driving.

Q. What advice would you give to someone thinking about this specialty?

A. Before embarking on training it would be helpful to doctors working within the hospital system to undertake a family planning certificate, do a subject or two in public health at uni, do a rotational term in a sexual health clinic or in O&G or a sexual assault course. Most rotational infectious diseases terms allow sessions in sexual health clinics too.

Q. How did you find the training program?

A. The training program is excellent! It is well structured with a high standard of teaching and level of consultant input is substantial.

Q. Are there any lifestyle benefits?

A. Certainly – due to little after hours clinical duties there is time to pursue other interests and/or spend time with the family.



What does the Chapter do?

The Chapter is involved in furthering the professional development of medical practitioners in the discipline of sexual health medicine. It achieves this by:

- setting educational standards in sexual health medicine
- promoting and staging scientific meetings and training courses
- supervising the training of medical graduates and advocating for improved undergraduate training
- promoting the role of specialist medical practitioners in the discipline
- arranging continuing medical education for Fellows and Trainees
- overseeing the assessment processes for trainees in sexual health medicine

The Chapter also provides expert advice on sexual health matters to government, and other organisations.

For more information on becoming a specialist in sexual health medicine

go to the Chapter's website at www.racp.edu.au or please contact the Chapter direct on:

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The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Adult Medicine Division

Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine



The Royal Australasian
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A career in Sexual Health Medicine





What is sexual health medicine?

Sexual health medicine is the specialised area of medical practice concerned with healthy sexual relations, including freedom from sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancy, coercion and physical or psychological discomfort associated with sexuality. Its practice encompasses the individual, population, social, interpersonal, microbial and immunological factors that contribute to Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual dysfunction and fertility regulation.

Sexual health medicine is concerned with the promotion of the sexual health of the community by identifying and minimising the impact of the above problems through education, behaviour change, advocacy, targeted medical and laboratory screening, clinical service provision, surveillance and research.

Sexual health medicine is a well-established field of medicine with equivalents in the United Kingdom and Europe. In Australia there are two well-established academic chairs of sexual health medicine (Melbourne and Sydney) actively involved in both teaching and research. There are several international journals devoted to sexual health medicine including the Australian journal *Sexual Health*. All State and Territory health departments recognise and employ specialists in sexual health medicine.



Specialists in sexual health medicine

Specialists in sexual health medicine offer support, education, training and research capacity as well as providing a consultancy service to general practitioners. They are key components of a response to address the rising rates of STIs in the community.

The specialist in sexual health medicine has had advanced training in the comprehensive management of sexual health issues and has a sound background in the principles and practice of population health medicine.



The characteristics of a specialist in sexual health medicine

The specialist in sexual health medicine would:

- have an open mind and a sense of humour!
- have the ability to work as part of a team of medical, nursing, counselling and laboratory staff
- be patient, enquiring, accurate, persistent and empathetic
- be non-judgemental and comfortable working with marginalised populations
- have good report writing and observations skills
- have excellent communication skills which are vital for patient interactions



How do I become a specialist in sexual health medicine?

Specialists in sexual health medicine have had a comprehensive training program since 1989. There is a requirement for all trainees to complete formal training in epidemiology, biostatistics, the diagnosis and management of sexually transmissible infections including HIV/AIDS, genital dermatology, reproductive health, sexual counselling and sexual assault medicine.

Trainees can apply to join the program as advanced trainees after the RACP basic training program, or with an appropriate Fellowship from another College. All trainees are required to complete at least two years of advanced training in sexual health. Some trainees will be given exemption from the third year, or part of that year, but will be required to undertake their placements in an area with which they are less familiar. (For example, an infectious diseases physician with extensive HIV experience would be required to spend two years in sexual and reproductive health clinics. A gynaecologist would be required to spend two years in HIV and sexually transmissible infection clinics.) In this way recognition is given for relevant prior learning and experience.