



**RACP**  
Specialists. Together  
EDUCATE ADVOCATE INNOVATE



Are you interested  
in becoming a specialist in

**SEXUAL HEALTH  
MEDICINE?**

## WHAT IS SEXUAL HEALTH MEDICINE?

Sexual health medicine is the specialised area of medical practice focused on healthy sexual relations, free from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) including HIV, 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 STIs, sexual assault, sexual dysfunction, and fertility regulation.

Sexual health medicine involves the promotion of the sexual health of the community by identifying and minimizing the impact of the above problems through education, behavior change, advocacy, targeted medical and laboratory screening, clinical service provision, surveillance, and research.

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 ([www.publish.csiro.au/sh](http://www.publish.csiro.au/sh)).

## SPECIALISTS IN SEXUAL HEALTH MEDICINE

Specialists in sexual health medicine are leaders in the field of sexual health. Sexual health specialists manage a broad range of patients and clinical scenarios including complex STI management, HIV outpatient care, genital dermatology and sexual dysfunction.

Specialists may be involved in the provision of gender affirming care, sexual assault medicine, contraception, and aspects of medical gynaecology. Specialists can provide a consultancy service to general practitioners and offer support, education, training, and research capacity. They are key components of a response to address the rising rates of STIs in the community, and advocate for sexual health issues at an individual and population level.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SPECIALIST IN SEXUAL HEALTH MEDICINE

A specialist in sexual health medicine:

- has an open mind and great communications skills
- has the ability to work as part of a team of medical, nursing, counselling and laboratory staff
- is patient, enquiring, accurate, persistent and empathic
- is non-judgemental and comfortable working with marginalised populations
- has good report writing and observations skills.

## HOW DO I BECOME A SPECIALIST IN SEXUAL HEALTH MEDICINE?

Trainees can apply to join the program as advanced trainees after successfully completing the RACP basic training program, or with an appropriate Fellowship from an approved medical college. Trainees may apply for recognition of prior learning for relevant experience completed prior to commencing Advanced Training in Sexual Health Medicine.

Advanced Training in Sexual Health Medicine encompasses 36 months of certified training of the following:

- six months (equivalent) each of reproductive health and HIV medicine

- nine months minimum each of female and male sexual health training
- optional six months of elective training (that may include sexual assault medicine, transgender medicine, genital dermatology, sexual function/dysfunction).

In addition to clinical training time, trainees are required to complete:

- an Advanced Training Research Project
- formal study requirements in fertility regulation, epidemiology, HIV medicine and laboratory methods
- one logbook in HIV medicine and reproductive health training respectively
- the Exit Assessment examination.



## SOME COMMENTS FROM CLINICIANS

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

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.

### What does a daily schedule look like?

A day might include consultations with outpatients who present with a wide range of complaints, combined with teaching, administrative, and research duties. Clinics are often based outside tertiary care settings so the role can involve travelling to a variety of locations.

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

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.

### How did you find the training program?

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

### Are there any lifestyle benefits?

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 Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine (AChSHM) supports the professional careers of all Fellows and trainees of the Chapter. Alongside other relevant College bodies and staff, the AChSHM works on the following as they relate to sexual health medicine:

- education, training, and assessment of trainees
- education, continuing professional development, and quality performance of Fellows
- policy and advocacy
- assessment of overseas-trained professionals
- research
- workforce.

The AChSHM Committee is the peak decision-making body for the Chapter, promoting and advancing the body of knowledge of sexual health medicine within the College.

VISIT

[www.racp.edu.au/trainees/  
advanced-training/advanced-training-programs/  
sexual-health-medicine](http://www.racp.edu.au/trainees/advanced-training/advanced-training-programs/sexual-health-medicine)