



Royal College of  
Obstetricians &  
Gynaecologists

# A Career in Obstetrics and Gynaecology



“

*There is rarely a day that goes by when you don't feel that you have made a real difference to one of your patients*

”

— Fetal medicine specialist



## What is obstetrics and gynaecology?

A career in obstetrics and gynaecology (O&G) can encompass a wide variety of different areas of medicine, making the specialty one of the most diverse areas in which to practise.

O&G has often been described as a mixture of medicine and surgery, and this is certainly a major attraction for many doctors.

### Obstetrics

The area of medicine that looks after mothers and their babies before, during and after birth.

This specialty is completely unique as the doctor will be looking after two people at the same time.

### Gynaecology

The area of medicine that covers female reproductive health outside of pregnancy. This includes reproductive and fertility medicine as well as sexual and reproductive health.

The flexibility of this unique and challenging specialty allows you to develop a wide range of interests and skills, be they cutting-edge surgery or solving complicated therapeutic problems.

The common link is women's health: before, during and after the reproductive years. However, our work is not confined to women but also their partners and family.

“

*O&G is definitely a career path for someone with great energy and flexibility*

”

— Academic obstetrician



# Why obstetrics and gynaecology?

O&G is a varied and exciting discipline within medical science. You can be actively involved in medical practice, such as working in a busy NHS hospital or in a family planning clinic.

If you are keen on scientific research and teaching, you can be involved in laboratory work at a research centre or supervising trainee doctors at a hospital. Some of the leading researchers have found ways to cure diseases and have pioneered treatment in fertility and stem cell research.

Obstetricians work closely with other specialties - some in maternity such as midwifery, anaesthesiology, physiotherapy and neonatology and others elsewhere in the hospital such as cardiology, renal and diabetes providing care for high risk women during pregnancy.

Gynaecologists work closely with radiologists, surgeons, nurse specialists and physiotherapists to provide holistic care to their patients.



“  
*As a specialty it covers not only disease management in the form of medicine and surgery but health promotion, ethics and counselling*  
”  
— O&G Trainee (ST4)



# How do I become an O&G specialist?

## A-Levels

You need three good 'A' levels to qualify for medical school at university; essential subjects usually include biology and chemistry.

## Medical student experience

There are many opportunities during your undergraduate studies to gain O&G experience:

### 1. Attachments

The timing of medical student exposure to O&G varies with each individual school and can incorporate teaching hospitals, district general hospitals and community experience. Many medical students find that O&G is one of the first specialties where they really get to be hands-on. With luck you will deliver a baby as part of your training!



### 2. Special study modules

Medical schools may have an opportunity for students to undertake a special study module, where some time is spent working in a specialty that you find particularly interesting. You are likely to undertake a written project as part of these modules and for many students this is a great opportunity both to experience O&G in greater depth and for those who are interested in academic career pathways to have an introduction.

### 3. Elective

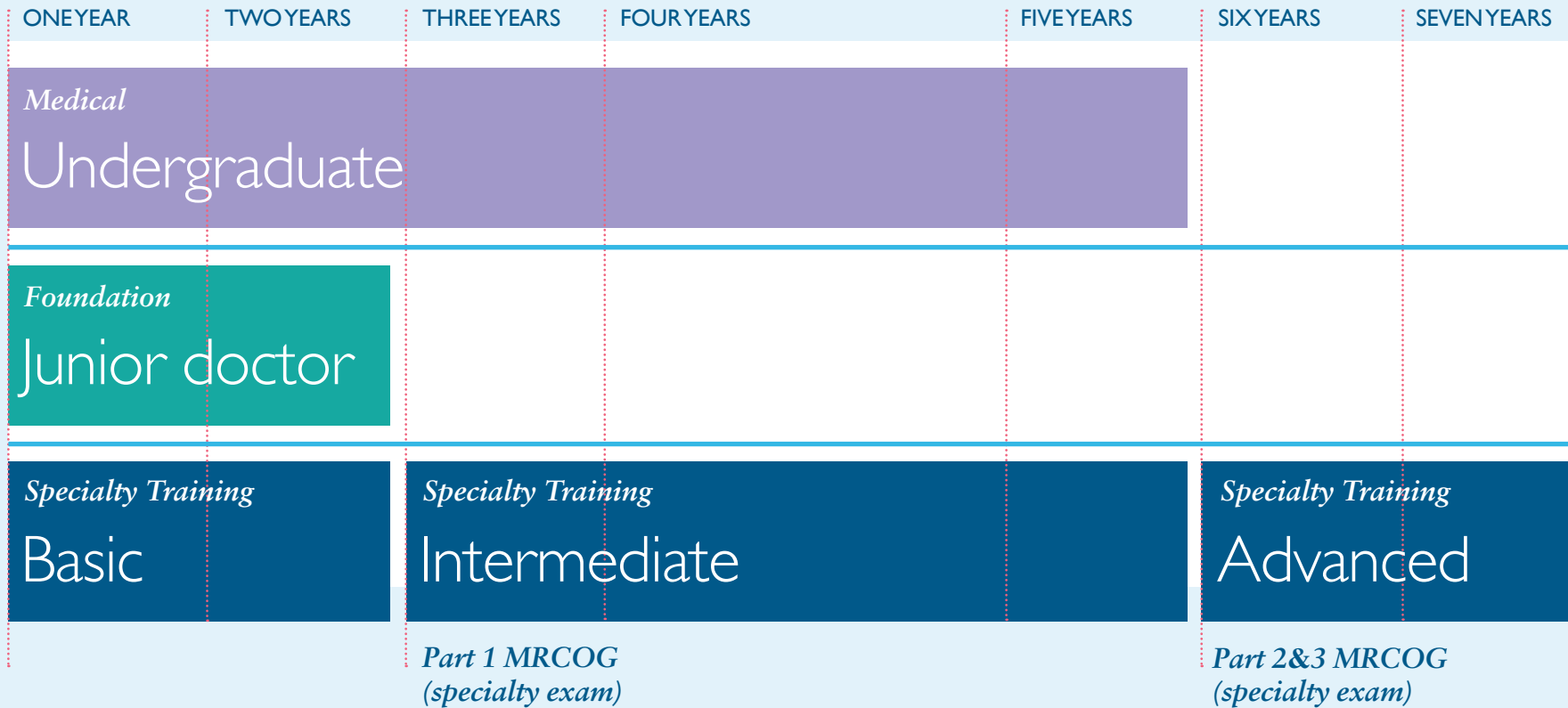
An elective is a 6-12 week period (depending on the medical school) where students study and learn away from their home medical school. Often this is time spent working overseas and is seen as an opportunity to learn more about you and to explore a particular area of medicine, such as O&G.



For more information please visit: [www.rcog.org.uk/careers](http://www.rcog.org.uk/careers)



# Career pathway for an O&G consultant



O&G  
Consultant





“ My medical elective was something that I had been looking forward to ever since embarking on a career in medicine. The endless possibilities of infinite locations, rare conditions and new experiences excited me to say the least. And finally after much preparation, enduring horrible vaccines and lots of packing the time had arrived. Day one began with my tour of the Amana hospital. I had been told prior to arrival that the hospital was extremely busy and at peak could have up to 100 births per day yet nothing could prepare me for the fast paced and very efficient environment I was about to embark on.

The main delivery room contained eight beds grouped in twos where labouring women were, around the corner to that was a bench where those who had delivered within the last 20 minutes or so were sitting followed by a large counter where lots of screaming new born babies were placed. I had never seen anything so busy in all my life. And to add to the pressure, there were lots of women waiting in the next ward to come over to the labour ward to deliver. There was so much going on. Babies were being delivered every 5 to 10 minutes at peak with new patients replacing them within 20 minutes of the births.

– Medical student in Tanzania



# Advanced skills training

Where you go in O&G depends upon your abilities and interests. After 5 years of general training the programmes offer you a wide range of options including taking advanced skills or subspecialty training.

## Gynaecology

Abortion Care

Acute gynaecology and early pregnancy

Advanced laparoscopy for the excision of benign disease

Benign abdominal surgery open and laparoscopic

Colposcopy

Forensic gynaecology

Hysteroscopy

Menopause

Oncology

Paediatric and adolescent gynaecology

Sexual health

Subfertility and reproductive health

Urogynaecology and vaginal surgery

Vulval disease

## Obstetrics

Advanced antenatal practice

Advanced labour ward practice

Fetal medicine

Labour ward lead

Maternal medicine

Medical education

Vulval disease



## An evolving speciality

Modern technology has brought about significant developments in recent years. These include:

- Ultrasound and body imaging
- Fertility treatment
- Minimal invasive techniques
- Molecular genetics
- Cervical cytology (the smear test)
- Family planning
- Hormone replacement therapy





## Subspecialty training

Subspecialists are obstetricians and gynaecologists who having undertaken additional higher training are recognised as experts in a particular field.

You can apply for a subspecialty training post after you have completed intermediate training and passed the MRCOG part 2 examination.

Subspecialty training lasts for three years: two years of clinical training and one year of research.



“  
*There are so many different strands to O&G that I knew I was never going to be bored*

— O&G Consultant



The training covers four areas:

- **Fetal and maternal medicine**
- **Gynaecological oncology**
- **Reproductive medicine**
- **Urogynaecology**

“ This speciality allows for the unique opportunity for early practical involvement, which makes gynaecological theatres and labour ward a thrilling place to be. Gynaecology is a broad spectrum speciality from the nervous teenager awaiting her first speculum examination, to the ruptured ectopic pregnancy collapsed with shock in Accident and Emergency to the woman who has just been diagnosed with metastatic ovarian cancer. The vast array of clinical diseases and interesting presentations I have witnessed has been phenomenal.

– O&G Trainee (ST1)



## Research

Research is the basis on which modern medicine is practised. Research may be undertaken in a laboratory setting or as part of a clinical research team.



Many trainees undertake a period of between one and three years in a research post which can be carried out at any stage of training.

For many trainees a research project can be the impetus to proceed down a particular pathway of training and develop a particular area of interest as a consultant.

“ On day one I was assigned to labour ward for ‘Observation of a C-section’, which was one of the compulsory criteria for passing the placement. Little did I know, as I scrubbed up, that I was about to experience a life changing moment, not just for the mother and father but more importantly at that stage, for me. As I witnessed the registrar performing an elective c-section proceeding to the successful delivery of a healthy baby, I was immediately overcome by emotion.

I knew instantaneously ‘THAT’ is what I wanted to do. I stood there and truly believed that no two deliveries could ever feel the same. Each experience so unique to the mother and father and in return a unique experience for the doctors involved. The thrill and flush of excitement of being part of a life changing moment was so enticing. To acquire the skills, knowledge and responsibility to safely deliver a new life into the world is something I knew I definitely wanted.

– O&G Trainee (ST2)



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## Global health

A career in O&G also provides opportunities to work overseas and gain skills and experience that can enhance and boost your confidence.

The nature of the difficulties facing health professionals in under-resourced countries are very different from anything most doctors experience in the UK. Volunteers can make a real difference to women's health care at a local level, but there are also benefits to you as a volunteer and also to your organization when you return to the UK.

Each year globally thousands of women die through maternity-related causes. A significant number of these deaths are entirely preventable, and it's incredible what a volunteer can achieve in a few months. Through education, training, implementing new systems of working, carrying out needs assessments and undertaking research, volunteers can and have brought about real improvements to women's health care and have helped save women's lives.



“ Spending a year in South Africa challenged me in so many ways and ultimately made me a better obstetrician. To be able to contribute to making pregnancy and childbirth safer for women in low resource environments where maternal and fetal mortality is high was a privilege.

— O&G Consultant



## Responsibility for training

The overall responsibility for the content of a junior doctor's training lies with the General Medical Council (GMC). However, the RCOG are charged by the GMC to develop the curriculum and assessment tools for O&G training.



The RCOG also manage the training and recruitment process.

Once you have successfully completed your O&G training you will receive a Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) and will be entered on to the GMC's O&G Specialty register.

For more information please visit: [www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org)



*It is a lovely combination of all aspects of medical training – surgery, medicine, imaging and counselling*

— Consultant in fetal and maternal medicine



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# About the RCOG

The RCOG is the professional body for O&G specialists and is responsible for their training, assessment and qualifications.



The College is dedicated to 'the encouragement of the study and the advancement of the science and practice of obstetrics and gynaecology'. We support O&G specialists in their daily practice and with professional development to help them deliver the highest standard of patient care.

The support available includes:

### Best practice, support and guidance

Information to assist doctors in deciding on appropriate treatment for specific conditions and to deliver the highest quality patient care

### Journals

A mixture of high-quality, peer reviewed articles and the latest quality medical research in women's health worldwide.

### CPD programme and revalidation

Doctors must maintain and improve their standards across all areas of their practice. The CPD programme enables doctors to remain up-to date in an ever changing environment. In the UK, the RCOG CPD programme is mandatory for all those practising obstetrics and/or gynaecology or its subspecialties in a career-grade post.

### Staying informed

Communications that keep doctors up to date on the latest news, issues and discussions in O&G.

For more information please visit our website: [www.rcog.org.uk](http://www.rcog.org.uk)



# Interesting facts

There are **2,200+** O&G consultant posts in the United Kingdom

The first IVF baby, Louise Brown, was born in July **1978**

Infertility affects up to **15%** of reproductive-aged couples worldwide

The RCOG was founded in **1929** and has over **13,000** members, with nearly half based overseas

By week **16** a baby in the womb has fingers and toenails, eyebrows and hair

Every year in the UK, over **3,000** women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and nearly **1,000** women will die from the disease

**1 in 10** women by the age of **80** will have had surgery for pelvic organ prolapse

There were approximately **750,000** deliveries in **2013**

The average weight of a baby born at full term (after 37 weeks) is around **3.5kg** or **7lbs**





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