



Londonwide LMCs

The professional voice of London general practice

Top tips for GP trainees

This month a new cohort of GP trainees take up their posts. We share some top tips from a current GP trainee and a GP trainer. If you work in a training practice please encourage your trainees to pass us their email address and the practice they're training at so we can add them to our mailing list – info@lmc.org.uk.

Dr Gemma Eyres is a GP trainee who was recently elected to Tower Hamlets LMC:

A warm welcome to all the new GP Trainees joining schemes across London this month! Despite challenging times, now more than ever, is an exciting time to be joining general practice. As a GP trainee member of the Tower Hamlets LMC I have been asked to pass on some 'top tips'.

So here it goes:

Relish every moment of the VTS

Despite re-naming the training scheme ump-teen times, I think we all still like to refer to it as the VTS (If you weren't aware that stands for vocational training scheme.)

Seriously though, training in general practice is great fun. It takes you away from didactic lectures and often encompasses a more holistic approach. Joint training days with other specialties, workshops with leading experts, exchange training days with other VTS schemes and of course the residential.

We have the most eclectic group of people of my VTS scheme and I've really enjoyed learning with and from them. I know my GP colleagues still pine for their VTS days – so enjoy it.

Portfolio – It's not as scary as you think

Don't panic about your portfolio. Of course it needs tender loving care and a regular maintenance but find a mentor in the years above you who can guide you through it. Perhaps bribe them with Cake and Coffee?

Less Than Full Time – There is help out there

I confess I am not less than full time, but many of my colleagues are and what a fabulous bunch they are. Whilst I appreciate that training might feel like a never ending road, some of the best GPs I've met trained less than full time, so take your time!

I do hear there can be difficulties with pay, hours and rotas but do not worry, there is a strong network of trainees who are less than full time who can guide you. My colleagues have recommended the Less than Full Time Training Guide on the London and South East Deanery website (please see below) and don't hesitate to contact the BMA for support.

LMC – Get involved!

The Local Medical Committee (LMC) represents the interest of primary care and its patients within each borough. I was lucky enough to sit in and observe a meeting a few years ago and was inspired by the passion for which my committee advocated for general practice and the wellbeing of the community. Before I knew it I was on the committee advocating loudly and proudly. So enquire about your local committee and try to arrange to observe a meeting – you never know where it'll take you.

Resilience

Finally, resilience, it's a bit of a buzz word at the moment but it has good cause to be. Training and working in General Practice is a marathon not a sprint. To me resilience is about recognizing when I'm tired, when I'm emotional and when I have too much on. It's about taking time for me, staying healthy and well rested.

I'm sure we'll all admit that there have been times when we've failed to recognize the warning signs of burn out and perhaps ended up in a heap when it's too late. That's ok. Know that there is support out there to firstly help prevent you getting to that point and secondly to give you a helping hand to get you on your feet again. Practitioner Health Programme has helped a number of us through difficult times and continue to do amazing work to support Doctors across London.

Dr Elliott Singer, GP trainer and Londonwide LMCs medical director for North East London:

So you've just started on a VTS. Hopefully you have decided to be a GP because of the amazing experience in general practice during your medical placements and as a FY2. Now just three years of further training and then the choice is yours. The three years will fly by and will hopefully be a fulfilling enjoyable experience. As Gemma has said, it is a marathon not a sprint and to get through it all and the assessments without too much stress you need to be slightly organised.

Eportfolio

The eportfolio can be your friend rather than a burden. Get in good habits early and enter reflective learning logs on a regular basis. Doing this rather than quickly doing a load prior to a 6 monthly review tends to improve the quality of the logs. Not only will you get more out of this, but your educational supervisor will be able to give you regular feedback to improve your learning. Learning how to write good quality reflective logs at an early part of training will help you throughout your career, ask your educational supervisor for feedback on your reflection. Getting your workplace-based assessments done in hospitals can be a bit tricky, make the best use of on calls and clinic times to get these done and don't leave it to the last minute. These are easier during your GP placements as you will be having a weekly tutorial with your trainer which will cover these.

Exams

During your training you need to pass both the applied knowledge test (AKT) and clinical structured assessment (CSA). You don't need to think about these straight away but do plan when to do them. A lot of trainees do their AKT at either the end of the second year or early in the third. I always think it is good to do it at the end of the second year so that your final year in general practice can focus on the CSA and what happens next. Regarding the CSA, don't do it too early in the year, you will need to develop your consultation skills and realistically the only way to do this is by seeing patients.

Post-VTS

This is probably something you are not considering yet but it is worth a little mention. Often people end up working in the area they trained. If you get a choice of training practice, try and think about what sort of practice you think you want to work in and choose one that closely resembles this. If your rotation includes the opportunity to spend time in more than one practice, makes the most of this and try to spend some time in a practice which you think is very different to what you want – you may be surprised. Remember that when you do finish training, you are an exceptionally valuable resource to the NHS, so, as they say, the choice is yours!