



Clinical
Oncology

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MY LIFE AS A CLINICAL ONCOLOGY TRAINEE (IN RESEARCH!)

Dr Sally Appleyard; clinical oncology trainee

I am a specialist registrar in clinical oncology currently taking time out of my training programme to spend in research (and complete an MD). I am 3 and half years through the 5 year training programme and work 3 days a week as I have young children.

My research projects are clinical, rather than basic science, and relate to quality of life, decision making and survivorship in urological cancers. Whilst the post was already funded, I have had considerable leeway to influence and design the projects.

My days are considerably different to when I was doing a clinical job. The pace is very variable, things can be hectic before a deadline but mainly I have control over my workload and time to think things through. I am based in an office with other clinical research fellows (of a number of specialties) within a clinical research unit, and there is a good atmosphere of collaboration. Plus it can be interesting to get view points from others with different backgrounds. I am also working with teams in other hospitals and external companies.

I am at the beginning of my MD at the moment, so much of my time is spent designing and setting up studies, including writing protocols, applying for funding and obtaining ethics approvals. Although this can be a lot of time in front of a screen – it is broken up by meetings and clinical work. As time goes on I will spend more time actually recruiting patients and conducting the studies.

Research is an adjustment: having time to design and see a project through is such a luxury compared to having a clinical job where six month attachments make longer term projects difficult. However, the loss of that immediate gratification of clinical work and not being 'needed' can be a challenge. Partly because of this I spend one session a week doing some clinical work, either a clinic or radiotherapy planning; this can be directly related to my research or just to keep my hand in!

Overall, despite the need to be self-motivated, and unfortunately the need to produce a thesis at the end of it all (!) taking time out to do research is allowing me time within the training programme to pursue my interests, gain new skills and work



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more independently. It also obviously enhances my CV as it includes time for me to write papers and attend conferences.

I didn't go into clinical oncology expecting to do research and certainly didn't want to spend time in a lab, but with encouragement from consultants and more senior trainees, and a realisation that research doesn't have to take you away from patients, I have been able to pursue this path to gain an insight and experience of something new.