

[← More Results](#)

[How can international medical graduates... Next article](#) [>](#)

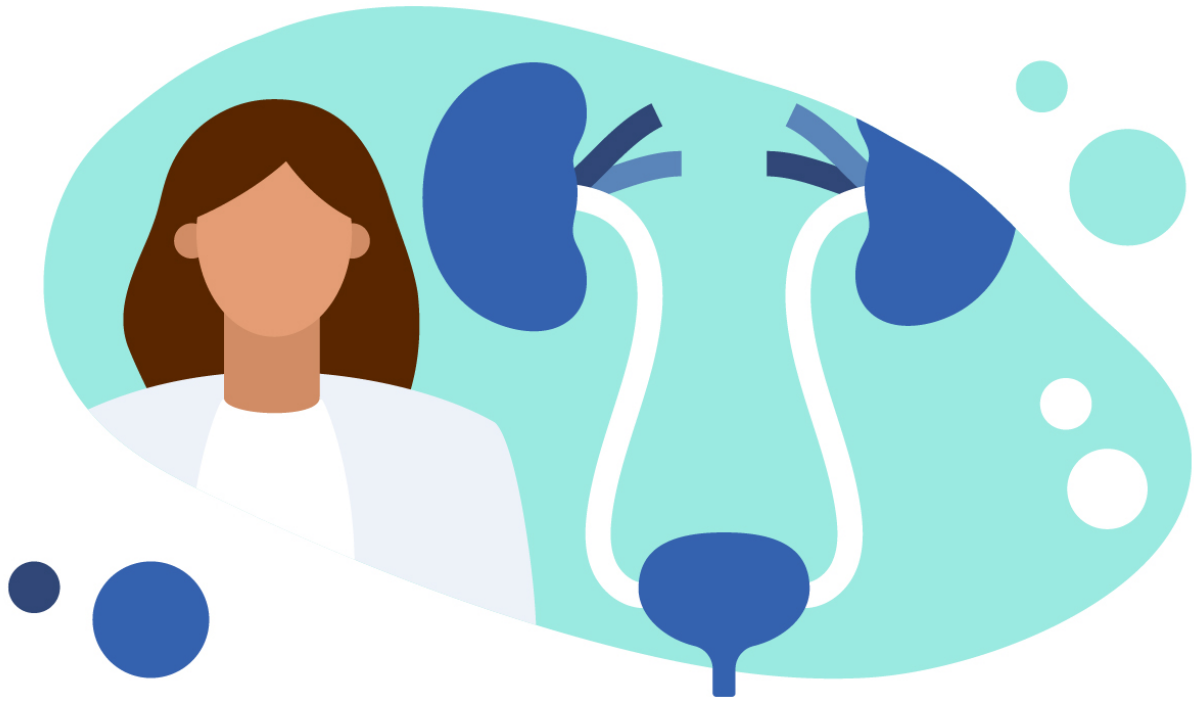
## The complete guide to becoming a genitourinary medicine doctor

Published on: 12 Jun 2025

Category: [Specialty guides](#)

---

**How do you become a doctor working in genitourinary medicine? This complete guide explains the essential information you need to pursue a career in genitourinary medicine in the UK.**



Genitourinary medicine (GUM) is a specialty that many medical students and foundation trainees have never encountered, but it's emerging as a vibrant and varied area of medicine that prides itself on working inclusively and responding rapidly to emerging challenges such as Mpox (monkeypox) and antimicrobial resistance.

### **The role of a genitourinary medicine doctor**

Working in GUM (sometimes called sexual health and HIV medicine) involves the investigation, diagnosis and management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and other blood-borne viruses such as hepatitis, in a diverse range of individuals, including young people and vulnerable populations such as intravenous drug users.

GUM doctors also work in promoting sexual health and wellbeing. This includes educating people about STIs and sexual health, and assessing and meeting emergency and standard contraceptive needs.

Doctors working in GUM may also manage non-infectious genital conditions such as dermatoses (skin conditions affecting the genital area, eg, vulval eczema). And they may work in other more specialised services such as clinics focused on young people, sexual dysfunction, sexual trauma and assault and psychosexual medicine, and in outreach services for sex workers and drug users.

### **The work of a genitourinary medicine doctor**

The work is largely medical, although it also involves some procedures and interventions including:

- Minor surgery, such as cryocautery and diagnostic skin biopsies
- Sexual screening for STIs through history taking and collection of samples of blood, urine and swabs from the genitals or throat
- Insertion and removal of contraceptive devices, including intrauterine devices and contraceptive implants
- Public health components, such as with partner notification (contact tracing), and collecting and reporting surveillance data to monitor trends in STIs and blood-borne viruses
- Education on sexual health and prevention.

Much of GUM work in sexual health and HIV care takes place in outpatient clinics, either attached to hospitals or in specialist clinics that may be located in the community. GUM clinicians can also work across inpatient care settings in HIV and general internal medicine. Multidisciplinary working is a key feature of GUM; the team includes specialist nurses, specialist pharmacists, health advisors, psychologists and peer support workers.

“I love working in GUM,” says Cara Saxon, consultant physician in genitourinary medicine at Sandyford Sexual Health Services and The Brownlee Centre in Glasgow, Scotland. She explains, “Infectious diseases are a fascinating area to work in and there is a lot of variety in GUM, ranging from diagnosing and treating STIs and caring for people living with HIV to managing skin conditions or psychosexual health issues.” She finds working in outpatients particularly fulfilling. “We can talk one-to-one with patients, often about sensitive issues. Sometimes, we have brief interactions where we treat acute infections and, at other times, we can build longer term relationships with patients who have more chronic health conditions such as HIV.”

### **Key skills of genitourinary medicine doctors**

Key skills and aptitudes required to work in GUM include:

- Enjoying contact with patients
- Excellent communication skills
- Empathy, being open-minded and non-judgemental
- Astute problem-solving and diagnostic skills
- Good teamwork skills and an ability to lead a multidisciplinary team and make decisions
- Emotional resilience and a calm approach.

“Good communication skills are absolutely key in GUM,” says Dr Saxon. “You need to be able to talk to patients sensitively, often about issues that they find difficult. Being inquisitive is a useful

attribute – really wanting to find out what’s causing a patient problems and finding a solution. And being good at working in a team is essential; GUM is definitely a team-based specialty.”

There is clear demand for GUM clinicians both now and for the future, with increasing rates of acute, complex and systemic STIs, and a growing number of people living with HIV.<sup>1</sup> With the wide range of conditions, health issues and patients managed in GUM, it can offer a varied and fulfilling career. A survey asking GUM physicians what they enjoyed most about their jobs found that 69% considered it was the opportunity to make a real difference to patients’ lives.<sup>2</sup>

Working in the specialty also requires the ability to recognise and respond to new public health challenges, such as Mpox (previously known as monkeypox) and efforts to minimise antibiotic resistance in STIs.

“The future for GUM looks exciting. As a specialty we are very responsive to new challenges. What we can offer patients now has transformed over the past 20 years,” said Dr Saxon.

### **A typical week in GUM**

One of the attractions of working as a GUM doctor is the variety of work and flexibility. A typical working week for a consultant in GUM is 40 hours or 10 sessions; around 75% of this time will typically be for direct clinical care and the remaining 25% for supporting professional activities and additional NHS responsibilities, such as teaching and leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Dr Saxon described her typical week: “I have five or six GUM sexual health clinics. These vary from unselected, acute presentations to sexual health clinics to a GUM clinic with more complex cases, such as syphilis. I also have clinics for vulvovaginitis and other genital dermatology conditions; one or two HIV clinics; pre-exposure prophylaxis (PreP); and, locally, we might have a clinic for genital warts. I’m involved in delivering regular teaching and training. And my non-clinical activities include: clinical leadership – I’m the local lead for clinical risk; research and development projects; and professional leadership work at a national level with the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH).”

Workload and duties can vary significantly depending on the nature of the role, seniority and special interests. The scope is influenced by the structure and skill mix of the team, the balance of HIV and GUM work and subspecialties, the clinical case mix and training commitments. On-call work varies depending on the job and location, but GUM typically has less antisocial hours and on-call shifts than other medical specialities. “GUM is a really good specialty for being able to find the work/life balance that suits you best. It’s such varied work that consultants’ careers can really differ. You can make it what you want it to be,” said Dr Saxon.

### **The route to genitourinary medicine**

After foundation training, people wanting to work in GUM typically do core training in internal

medicine (IM; 3 years) or, alternatively, in acute care common stem internal medicine (ACCS-IM; 4 years). This is followed by specialty training (ST3-6) in genitourinary medicine and general internal medicine (4 years).<sup>4</sup> This dual accreditation was introduced in August 2022 to enhance training in internal medicine to boost experience and skills in managing acutely unwell medical patients who may also have complex presentations associated with chronic disease and comorbidities.<sup>4</sup>

GUM training can be delivered in a variety of settings, including out-patient clinics/services, hospitals and in the community. Trainees gain experience and competencies in genitourinary medicine, HIV medicine and contraception; additional competencies include obstetrics and gynaecology, laboratory and pathology, dermatology and public health. Learning is recorded in an online e-portfolio and trainees participate in clinical workplace-based assessments, reflections, feedback from colleagues and patients and annual reviews of competence progression. The [training curriculum](#) is overseen by the Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board.

GUM trainees are expected to pass two knowledge-based exams – the [diploma in genitourinary medicine](#) and the [diploma in HIV medicine](#) – before they are awarded a certificate of completion of training (CCT) in GUM and IM. Attaining the [diploma of the faculty of sexual and reproductive health](#), [letter of competence subdermal contraceptive implants techniques insertion and removal](#) and [letter of competence intrauterine techniques](#) are recommended but not mandated. It typically takes a total of seven years' full-time training (after foundation training) to become fully qualified in GUM. Less than full-time training in GUM is also possible, to fit with trainee's requirements.

### **How competitive is genitourinary medicine?**

Application figures suggest there is a good chance of gaining a training post in GUM. There were more NHS training posts in GUM than applications in 2024, with 27 applications for 51 ST4 posts in genitourinary medicine (competition ratio of 0.53),<sup>5</sup> and the competition ratio was similar at 0.47 in 2023.<sup>6</sup> This means the specialty compares favourably with some other ST4 training specialties; for example, the competition ratio for gastroenterology was 3.18 in 2024.<sup>5</sup>

If you want to gain experience in GUM before applying, try to attend any relevant training days and/or organise a 'GUM taster' opportunity. Ask your local GUM consultant, team or clinic about opportunities to gain some experience of the specialty. [The Student and Trainee Association of Sexual Health and HIV \(STASHH\)](#) provides information on GUM taster days

(including an annual national taster day), conferences, projects, career events and more. STASHH also provides tips to help with applications for specialty training in GUM.

For pre-specialty doctors, opportunities include consideration of prioritising GUM/sexual health and associated specialties in foundation training; you can also contact [your local GUM trainee rep](#) to arrange local taster days. Medical students can contact their undergraduate sexual health or local GUM clinic to find out more. Medical elective placements may be available in GUM/HIV at [Chelsea and Westminster Hospital](#) and [Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust](#) in London, and also in [Brighton](#).

There were 227 consultants in GUM in the NHS in England in 2021 (specific numbers are not available for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).<sup>7</sup> Around two-thirds of consultants working in GUM are women, according to recent figures.<sup>8</sup>

### **Subspecialties**

There are a wide range of subspecialties within GUM, including: HIV medicine, genital dermatology, contraception, public health, microbiology, and sexual assault. And there are further opportunities to subspecialise in other areas of GUM such as complex sexual health conditions, genitourinary medicine, prevention, and working with particular groups of patients, including adolescents, men who have sex with men, drug users and sex workers. Consultant jobs include opportunities to work in these subspecialties, in addition to general GUM.

There are good opportunities for getting involved in research or developing a research career in GUM. "GUM offers a wide range of research topics, from highly scientific research on new HIV therapies to public health interventions and socioeconomic projects exploring inequity of access to sexual health care," explained Dr Saxon. [Integrated academic training](#) is available in GUM. Opportunities include academic clinical fellowships and academic clinical lectureships. These are applied for through a separate national process to the standard specialty application process. Academic trainees' time is usually split into 75% clinical training and 25% research or education training. Lectureship posts are available for people at a more advanced stage in their specialty training, after obtaining a doctoral research degree.

### **Earnings**

NHS consultant salaries are the same for all specialties but vary between Scotland (highest), England, Northern Ireland, and Wales (starts lowest) and increase with service (up to 19 years). In 2025 the salary bands range from £105,504 to £139,882. Salaries can be further enhanced with NHS excellence awards. Full details about NHS pay for all grades can be found [here](#).

There are some opportunities for private work in GUM, generally working for private healthcare

providers offering GUM services. This may include sexual health screening, and diagnosis and treatment of STIs; psychosexual medicine; HIV care; and genital dermatology. However, GUM focuses particularly on working with disadvantaged groups of patients, which limits the scope for working privately. And there are opportunities to teach and work abroad.

## Resources

Organisations providing leadership, membership, training and information in GUM include:

[British Association for Sexual Health and HIV \(BASHH\)](#)

[Student and Trainee Association of Sexual Health and HIV \(STASHH\)](#)

More information on careers in GUM:

[BASHH. Love GUM Genitourinary Medicine](#)

The key journals in GUM include:

[Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STI\)](#)

[The International Journal of STD and AIDs](#)

## References

1. Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board. [Genitourinary Medicine Curriculum](#), 2022.
2. The British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH). [Why choose GUM?](#) (accessed 12 June 2025).
3. BMA. [Genitourinary medicine \(GUM\) job planning guidance and model job plan example](#) (accessed 12 June 2025).
4. Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board. [Training pathways](#) (accessed 12 June 2025).
5. NHS England. [Competition ratios for 2024](#), 23 September 2024.
6. NHS England. [Competition ratios for 2023](#), 22 September 2023.
7. NHS. [Genitourinary medicine](#) (accessed 12 June 2025).
8. RCP Medical Workforce Unit. [Working differently in the shadow of COVID-19: the 2021 UK census of consultant, higher specialty trainee and SAS physicians](#), 13 October 2022.

## Related links

- [Which are the most competitive medical specialties for NHS training posts?](#)
- [The complete guide to becoming an obstetrics and gynaecology doctor](#)
- [The complete guide to becoming a urology doctor](#)

Share this article [✉](#) [f](#) [X](#) [in](#) [p](#) [🌐](#)

## Related articles



[The complete guide to becoming a palliative medicine doctor](#)



[The Complete Guide To Becoming An Anaesthetist](#)



[The Complete Guide To The Complete Guide To Becoming an Aviation and Space Medicine Doctor](#)

## Latest articles

[Tips for passing the MRCP Part 2](#)

[Why senior doctor burnout peaks mid-career and what we can do about it](#)

[Tips for passing the MRCPCH Theory and Science exam](#)

## Jobseekers

[Home](#)

[Find a job](#)

[Job alerts](#)

[Search recruiters](#)

[Career advice](#)

[My account](#)

[CV services](#)

[Recruiters - advertise with us](#)

## BMJ Careers

[About us](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Terms & Conditions](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Accessibility](#)

## Explore BMJ

[BMJ Best Practice](#)

[BMJ Careers](#)

[BMJ Company](#)

[BMJ Health Careers](#)

[BMJ Impact Analytics](#)

BMJ Journals

BMJ Learning

BMJ OnExamination

BMJ Research to Publication

The BMJ

BMJx- Events



Cookie settings