What is special about Neonatology?

The newborn period is a precarious stage of life as the baby tries to adapt to extrauterine life. All the basic sciences are relevant including embryonic and fetal development, genetics, biochemistry and physiology. The degenerative diseases of adults do not occur in neonates who often recover well from illness.

What does Neonatology involve?

A varied specialty
The neonatologist can be a generalist with knowledge of several specialty areas and is involved in several types of work:

- Care of premature or sick babies receiving intensive care, as well as less dependent ones.
- Screening of newborns for abnormality and giving health information to their parents.
- Outpatient follow-up of babies with problems to detect problems with health and development.
- Antenatal care in complicated pregnancies in conjunction with obstetricians.

A practical specialty
There is the need to be up to date with many practical skills, the use of high-tech equipment, communication skills and decision-making.

Team work
The job is often busy, generating a strong culture of team working.

Neonatology as a career
Whilst neonatology can be busy and stressful, it is compatible with a good work-life balance.

Great potential for research
As a relatively young specialty, there is great potential for research which improves outcomes.

Training in Neonatology

Foundation
There may be the opportunity for a full neonatal Foundation attachment, or otherwise a “taster”.

Paediatric training
All paediatric trainees do some neonatology, and those interested in a career involving the specialty then do more during higher specialist training.

Consultant posts
There is the opportunity to work as a:

Paediatrician
with an interest in neonatology – this involves work with older children as well as babies.

Neonatologist in a Local Neonatal Unit
delivering care to all but the smallest and sickest babies.

Neonatologist in a NICU
looking after a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), often in a teaching hospital – this is care of the sickest and most preterm babies, including those transferred from surrounding units.
What is a Neonatal Unit like?

There is a real buzz about a neonatal intensive care unit.

Members of the team may with one case have to think and react quickly to an emergency, whilst the next case may need a much more considered approach with multi-disciplinary input.

Staff get to know the families of the most dependent babies very well.

Neonatology as a student

The neonatal attachment

There is usually teaching in the neonatal unit both in the teaching hospital and during a peripheral attachment.

As well as attending ward rounds and clinics, try to attend emergencies, chat to staff, and become involved with the care of babies in the unit.

Student projects

Most medical schools have Student Selected Components (SSC). Some are project-based and others aim to provide exposure to clinical aspects of the specialty. Find out about neonatal options from the medical school or by contacting one of the local neonatologists.

RCPCH Annual meeting

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health funds several students to attend their Annual Meeting on a competitive basis.

Useful Contacts

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), the professional body for paediatrics, which provides information about careers in the specialty: www.rcpch.ac.uk

The British Association of Perinatal Medicine (BAPM), specialist organisation for professionals involved in the care of pregnant women, newly delivered mothers and newborn babies: www.bapm.org

Bliss, the leading special care baby charity which works with parents and health professionals to drive forward the quality of care: www.bliss.org.uk

Local contacts

Your local Deanery, Head of School, or Regional Advisor.

About BAPM

Who are we?

Established in 1976, the British Association of Perinatal Medicine exists to promote excellence in British perinatal care. We produce standards and frameworks for practice and advise on training and education to help recruit and train high calibre graduates in neonatal care and associated areas.