

# Working as a geriatrician

## New Zealand geriatricians talk about the reality of working within this field

### **Why did you choose geriatric medicine and what do you like most?**

Working with older people is rewarding and interesting and the work is extremely diverse. As well as providing an interface with the community, geriatric medicine adopts an approach that seeks to understand the impact of physical illness, psychological illness, social and environmental factors on the health of older people. It also enables greater continuity of care than can be attained in many specialty areas, so it is possible for you to develop long-term relationships with patients.

### **What strengths and abilities make a good geriatrician?**

You need to have a positive attitude towards ageing and you must be prepared to manage cases over a long period of time and to care for those who are dying. It is important to possess clinical acumen and sound judgement, since you need to balance the application of investigations and therapeutic procedures with long-term benefits to the individual. Patience, communication skills and an ability to work in a team are all essential attributes. It is important to be able to treat people holistically and not just their presenting disease.

### **As a specialist, can you describe a typical day?**

A typical week for a hospital-based specialist would involve a combination of inpatient care, outpatient clinics, ward consultations (surgical, medical, and psychogeriatric) and community visits.

### **What do you think are the future challenges of geriatric medicine?**

Demographic changes will result in increasing demand for the services of geriatric medicine. Advances in technology are being made, although the degree to which these can be implemented on a clinical basis will depend on resources and rationing.

### **What advice would you give someone thinking about a career in geriatric medicine?**

You should talk to enthusiastic geriatricians. In preparation for advanced training you should undertake broad clinical training with experience in subspecialties that have particular relevance to chronic illness (such as rheumatology, neurology, psychiatry and cardiology). Research experience is also desirable.

### **What are future opportunities in geriatric medicine?**

Job opportunities are increasing and career options in this field are expanding.

### **What is the work/life balance like?**

It should be possible for you to take time out to travel or to start a family. Geriatric medicine is reasonably flexible and has a good record in accommodating these needs.

The impact on family life varies between individuals, although the specialty does tend to be less demanding than others in terms of after-hours commitments.