

Thinking of Occupational and Environmental Medicine?

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Overview of Occupational and Environmental Medicine

An **occupational physician** applies high-level medical skills to the interface between a person's work and his or her health. For an individual worker-patient, this may mean seeking evidence for the work-relatedness of a disease, assisting return to work after injury, or assessing fitness for safety-critical work. For groups of workers, this may mean working to reduce known harmful exposures, research on the effects of exposures or clusters of adverse health effects, or promotion of wellness.

Traditionally, the term exposure has applied to dusts, airborne toxins, radiation and noise. Trends suggest that future exposures will be very much concerned with the changing design of work – more part-time and home-based work and greater proportions of immigrant workers and workers supplied to companies by labour hire firms. A worker's mobility, dexterity, aerobic capacity, vision, hearing, skin and reliable mental function will remain the focus of occupational medicine.

An **environmental physician** is likewise concerned with exposures and their effect on health. These exposures come from air, water, soil, food, and recreation or play.

General practitioners and public health physicians conduct much medical activity in this area, so physicians coming from a background in occupational medicine have tended to address environmental hazards generated by industry – be they neighbourhood noise or dust, chemical spills from tankers, or contamination of sites or waterways.

Environmental physicians have served teams assessing the spread and health effects of an environmental incident, or in planning to reduce the risks of fires, explosions or sabotage. The curriculum leans toward these areas but we recognise that some roles of a physician addressing environment-related health effects are as yet beyond imagination.

Specialty training

Physician training is undertaken through the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) via the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM).

To be eligible to enter the Occupational and Environmental Medicine (OEM) training programme a trainee must meet the following criteria:

- medical registration with general scope of practice with the Medical Council of New Zealand
- completed at least two full-time years of postgraduate general clinical experience
- applied for (with the intent of enrolling in and continuing), or completed an appropriate postgraduate course at diploma level or above in occupational and environmental health or a related field deemed appropriate by the overseeing committee

- hold an accredited position of employment that requires on average no less than 20 hours of occupational and environmental medicine practice per week
- reached an agreement with an AFOEM Fellow to be Educational Supervisor, and have had this approved by the relevant regional Training Programme Director (TPD)

The OEM training programme consists of:

- a minimum of 42 months of training over the course of the training programme
- a variety of teaching and learning activities, including work-based learning and assessment requirements, and other formative and summative programme requirements. These are carried out in consultation with their supervisors.

Upon completion of the training, Fellowship of the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (FAFOEM) is awarded.

Personal qualities required to be an Occupational and Environmental Physician

- understanding of harmful exposures, and laws that bear on exposure control and employment opportunity
- ability to gain influence within organisations to prevent work-related afflictions and to promote wellness
- fostering of a patient-centred approach to health care
- maintenance of a balanced and broad perspective on health care delivery
- preparedness to learn and adopt new and validated approaches to diagnosis and management, despite logistical difficulties, and to change work practices when appropriate
- willingness to reflect on, and learn from, mistakes
- preparedness to change management plans
- tolerance of uncertainty
- ability to cope with unexpected disappointments, equanimity, resiliency and calmness in the face of challenging clinical demands
- desire to contribute to improvements in the health system
- desire to foster clinical practice, research and teaching in general internal medicine
- preparedness to acknowledge doubt and uncertainty in clinical practice.

Specialty Training Programme Information

Medical College

[Royal Australasian College of Physicians \(RACP\)](#)

Fellowship/Qualification

Fellowship of the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (FAFOEM)

Application and Selection process

Application/selection: [Training in Environmental and Occupational Medicine](#)

Contact details OccEnvMed@racp.edu.au

To find out more about physicians/paediatricians and other specialty areas, [click here](#). This also provides a useful Q&A section.

Further information can be obtained on [Royal Australasian College of Physicians \(RACP\)](#)

Resident Medical Officer (RMO) Information

Demand for vocational training posts is currently not available

RMO training registrar positions contracted

Northern*	Midland*	Central*	South Island*	Total*
148.7	42	103.6	80.5	374.8

(September 2016 RMO census)

*The number is not separately available but included in the total registered in Internal Medicine

Regions

Northern:

Northland, Waitemata, Auckland, Counties Manukau DHBs

Midland:

Lakes, Tairāwhiti, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Taranaki DHBs

Central:

Hawke's Bay, Wanganui, MidCentral, Wairarapa, Capital and Coast, Hutt Valley DHBs

South Island:

Nelson Marlborough, Canterbury, South Canterbury, Southern, West Coast DHBs

Senior Medical Officer (SMO) Information

Year	Number of NZ New Fellows
2015	NOT AVAILABLE
2014	NOT AVAILABLE

Average Age of SMOs*	Number registered with the Medical Council *	% of international medical graduates in the workforce*
51	1024	42

Number by Region (September 2016 SMO census)

Northern		Midland		Central		South Island		Total	
FTE*	Headcount*	FTE*	Headcount*	FTE*	Headcount*	FTE*	Headcount*	FTE*	Headcount*
159.1	188	50.5	52	47.2	57	83.3	116	340	413

*The number is not separately available but included in the total registered in Internal Medicine.