

ADVANCED HEALTHCARE SCIENCE CAREERS WITHIN MICROBIOLOGY

Deputy Laboratory Manager **Francis Yongblah** looks at future opportunities from the perspective of a senior biomedical scientist working to advance their role.

The healthcare science (HCS) workforce plays a central role in safe and effective patient care across all pathways, from conception to end of life. There are about 50,000 employees in the HCS workforce in the NHS in the UK, and they are involved in approximately 80% of all clinical diagnoses.

Most microbiology laboratories across the country are heavily medically-led by medical consultant microbiologists. Over the last few years there has been a steady decline in the number of students applying to medicine. This has been exacerbated by “negative publicity” in 2015 in addition to cost. In 2016, it was the first time that places in medicine were offered through clearing.

There are a large number of consultant microbiology posts that it is a struggle to fill, with fewer applicants and more vacancies appearing. For this reason, NHS Improvement and Health Education England are working hard on the long term plan for workforce, which

is looking at developing a Healthcare Science Workforce Programme to support implementation of the NHS Long Term Plan and expand the frontiers of medical science and innovation, introducing new treatment possibilities for 21st century care, such as whole genome sequencing.

The programme will bring together partners to model and plan the workforce, introducing flexible entry routes, better careers, new roles and ways of working, and competency-based development frameworks. These will underpin flexible and responsive systems of education, training and leadership and build on good practice in the system. Workforce planning for the future is crucial to ensure that the NHS remains sustainable and that it can still provide a crucial service to patient.

It can be observed from this evidence that there are some future risks to the NHS. So in order to ensure sustainability and prepare

succession planning, advanced healthcare scientist roles will be a future requirement to ensure that microbiology departments are able to provide a vital service, and that scientific staff within microbiology have an opportunity to develop further. Currently, the only route within microbiology to develop is through the management route, however, this is not for everyone.

Within healthcare, advanced roles have become a crucial part of planning, to ensure that services are still able to run and provide a service. This is seen within wards where there are now consultant nurses and consultant midwives who are trained to a higher level, that are highly qualified to give advice and that are competent to carry out a higher and more responsible role.

Opportunities to develop

The Higher Specialist Scientist Training (HSST) is a five-year programme available to registered and experienced clinical scientists who may want to become a consultant clinical scientist. The work-based training programme is equivalent to the standards of training undertaken by medical postgraduate trainees and gives trainees the possibility of gaining Medical Royal College qualifications. For many biomedical scientists the only option to develop further is through the management route. However, many would prefer to be connected to the science and the diagnostics.

HSST in microbiology enables further development within a distinct diagnostic area of healthcare science, with the addition of innovation and research, leadership and management.

Succession planning for the future

Laboratory managers and service managers responsible for microbiology should seriously consider looking at the options for taking on in-service and direct-entry



HSST training posts and integrating advanced healthcare roles within Microbiology departments. This is a key opportunity to develop staff within their departments that are academically focused and highly skilled already


Is an advanced healthcare scientist career the right option for you?

Before considering going into an advanced healthcare scientist training programme, such as HSST to become a consultant healthcare scientist, you must ask yourself some serious questions and be completely honest with yourself. The HSST programme is a very hard programme that will require applicants to be hardworking, dedicated and focused. Completing the professional doctorate, Fellowship of the Royal College of Pathology (FRCPath) exams

and clinical training is not easy and requires applicants to reflect on themselves and their current situation to determine whether they will be able to dedicate the extra time that is required to reach a consultant level. This will mean doing extra work and studying on the weekends and after work so that the individual can keep up with the requirement. It's also important to remember that an advanced healthcare scientist career will require you to be an "all rounder" and be able to balance being a microbiologist with also being a leader and manager, innovator and researcher, as well as a consultant. Work is currently being undertaken by workforce planning to see whether there is a place within microbiology for a role of a consultant biomedical scientists in the same way there is in histopathology. The role of a

consultant healthcare scientist will require an individual to work hard to shape the future of the NHS.

What do I hope to achieve at the end of HSST?

At the end of HSST I hope to have a professional Doctorate, completed the FRCPath by examination, completed the Postgraduate diploma in Leadership and Management in Healthcare and finally be registered as a consultant healthcare scientist. I hope that I will be in a position to shape the future of diagnostic microbiology and to bring around a change to the culture and structure within my microbiology department as well as being an example for other departments across the UK. 

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