Experience training in Staffordshire and Shropshire

Developing people for health and healthcare
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There are four excellent schemes in this area located in:

- Shropshire - including Telford and Shrewsbury
- North Staffordshire - including Stoke-on-Trent.
- South Staffordshire - including Stafford, Cannock, Rugeley and Womborne area
- East Staffordshire - including Burton, Lichfield and Tamworth

In the first round of GP Recruitment 2016, 88 trainees made Staffordshire and Shropshire their first choice. This made the Training Programme the eighth most popular in the UK and the most popular of the non-city based schemes.

Staffordshire and Shropshire GP Training is the largest training area within the West Midlands and trains 25% of all the GP trainees in the West Midlands. The 4 schemes have the capacity to train 220 GP registrars each year. In addition, Shropshire VTS has consistently had positive feedback from GP registrars in the West Midlands Trainee Survey.

Brief attractions of living and working in the area
The area covers 44% of the West Midlands Region and has traditionally been a blend of history, innovation and culture set in a remarkable landscape.

Easy access to many outdoor activities in the area, such as the Shropshire Hills, Cannock Chase, the Staffordshire Peak District and even Mid-Wales a short drive away. Many festivals and events take place during the summer. Traditional crafts such as the pottery and tile industry as well as the brewing industry around Burton still flourish amongst modern developments.
Staffordshire and Shropshire

Provincial Theatres are based in Wolverhampton, Telford, Shrewsbury, Stafford and Stoke and show local and West End Shows, comedy, ballet and music events throughout the year.

The area is family friendly with castles, historical houses, walks and theme parks. Skiing is available all year at the Tamworth Snowdome and there are plenty more sporting activities with many football, cricket, hockey and rugby teams ready to welcome you. There is also a fantastic canal network and plenty of cycling and walking routes.

Leek and parts of North Staffordshire are within commuting distance of Manchester. For those wishing to settle, housing for rent or purchase is readily available and affordable. Furthermore, School standards are generally very good at both primary and secondary level.

Key Contacts

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The Teaching Programme

GP Training is a three year development programme developing doctors from a foundation level of knowledge and competence and giving them the experiences and guidance to allow them to graduate with MRCGP and the skills to cope in the increasingly demanding profession of General Practice.

There are 18 months of additional non-GP attachments based within hospital or community posts. The GP registrar is supported by Clinical Supervisors in these settings who are confident with the GP curriculum.

18 months are based within two different practices in each VTS area. Here the GP registrar is immersed into the GP team and should experience a large number of clinical encounters, facing clinical/psychological and social dilemmas. They are supported by the GPs within the practice.

Throughout the three years of the Training Programme they will be supported by the Training Programme Directors and their personal Educational Supervisor.

The Learning Environments within Staffordshire and Shropshire

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Area Study Days
There is a programme of Area Study Days looking at important or topical areas in GP Development. There is also an Exit Day for ST3 who are approaching the end of their training.

VTS approach
There are at least 24 study half-days usually on a Thursday where the VTS group of GP trainees get together and discuss issues relevant to General Practice. This is an opportunity to learn from your peers and also take a lead in discussions.

Cluster learning
Outside the VTS sessions there are smaller learner led cluster sessions which are usually organised geographically. These provide an opportunity to cover aspects of the curriculum in more depth, improve knowledge for the AKT examination and to role play consultations in preparation for the CSA examination.

Training Practice
This provides a quality assured environment for experiencing General Practice whilst still having the safety net of an experienced GP available for support. Exposure to patients leads to clinical confidence and improved decision making. The supervising GP is available for guidance and assistance in order to ensure patient and doctor safety is maintained.

Staffordshire and Shropshire Training Practices face similar demands to all General Practices. Some practices are very much “inner city” with a large number of patients with socio-economic problems. Other practices face the problems of rural isolation often being located away from major towns and hospitals. Each practice has its own challenges but all will provide a worthwhile experience for potential GPs.

Hospital and Community Attachments
There are some innovative community posts such as sexual health clinics, hospice attachments and public health posts. Others are based at acute, community and mental health hospitals. Each post will have a clinical supervisor who is familiar with the GP Curriculum. They should also help with the Work-Base Place Assessments needed for MRCGP.

First 5 Groups
After attaining MRCGP and completing training, the first few years can be challenging both clinically as well as administratively. The First 5 Groups in each area are invaluable in providing peer support for newly qualified GPs. They can also provide a useful network for young doctors to keep them informed about opportunities and vacancies as well as keeping them up to date with local CCG and structural changes.

The RCGP provides additional First-5 support on a regional as well as local level. All areas have active First-5 groups run by newly qualified GPs.

There is a Facebook Page which is a wall for practices to advertise vacancies and other opportunities. It has also been used by newly qualified GPs to make practices aware of their availability. You can search for Staffordshire and Shropshire General Practice Exchange.

Follow local education and training news on Twitter @GPStaffsShrops.
Staffordshire and Shropshire

Local support for MRCGP assessments

The trainers have a positive attitude towards providing the necessary support for GP registrars to pass the CSA and AKT. Each VTS has a lead TPD who will provide additional support and advice for registrars who may have communication or language problems. Newly qualified GPs who have recently been through the process, as well as experienced trainers also provide additional advice.

Each VTS area organises training days looking at the CSA, giving feedback of communication skills and discussing management of complex problems. Ideally potential problems should be identified early and action taken to improve the situation for the GP registrar.

Opportunities within each Vocational Training Scheme

- Four GP training packages based at Burton, Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent and Shrewsbury/Telford
- Well-established network of experienced trainers across the areas
- Good standard of Educational Reviews and trainee support through-out
- University Hospital of North Staffordshire acts as a tertiary centre
- District General Hospitals based at Burton, Stafford, Telford and Shrewsbury delivering training focussed on GP curriculum and GP requirements

Shropshire VTS

Large scheme with 70 trainees provides into two more effective smaller schemes on a Thursday morning and afternoon.

Secondary care jobs are delivered at two hospital centres at the county town of Shrewsbury as well as Telford. Both these hospitals are working closely with the TPDs to deliver GP focussed training.

GP trainers are well motivated and provide superb support for trainees who are accepted into the practice team. Practices can be town or rural based. The out-of-hours provider ShropDoc provides well-supported OOHs training for the GP trainees.

The GP cluster Quality Assurance Visit organised by Health Education England highlighted the following notable achievements in 2013:

- Enthusiastic TPD’s, trainees and trainers
- Supervision and support good with trainees
- Shropdoc (Out of Hours) is good, supervision excellent with trainer involvement
- Foundation experience form used in ST1 to allocate ST2 posts
- C.S.A. training involving trainers is good
- Trainer workshops highly appreciated.
- VTS split into morning and afternoon so that everyone is not out of the hospital at the same time.
- Good JEST/GMC Survey results.
Staffordshire and Shropshire

East Staffordshire VTS (Burton)

Hospital jobs based at Queens Hospital, Burton-on-Trent where there is a good working relationship between consultants and the training programme directors and local GPs. GP training is based along the Trent corridor at Tamworth, Lichfield and Burton in well-established training practices. There is a high standard of educational support and feedback for trainees.

Around 40 trainees in the scheme and in 2012-2013 no trainees failed CSA.

The scheme has developed a well-received ethics day and also organises a muscular skeletal medicine day at St Georges Park.

Health Education England Quality Assurance Visit in September 2013 said;

- There is high quality training experiences - all the trainees are happy
- Half day release includes well organised, Balint Group learning in which all trainee participate and which is effective and valued by all trainees.
- Motivated, creative and enthusiastic trainers who network and communicate well; a group who act collectively, responsibly dealing with issues of governance, probity and significant event audits

North Staffordshire VTS

This is the only VTS in both the West Midlands and UK which offers parallel scheme with some trainees opting to attend Master of Medical Science modules at University of North Staffordshire (Keele) whilst others attend a more traditional VTS base at the Royal Stoke Hospital of the University Hospital of North Midlands.

The Health Education England Quality Assurance Visit in 2014 said;

- An established Vocational Training Scheme (VTS) on an upward trajectory in terms of reported satisfaction levels amongst Trainees, with a strong academic ethos
- Trainees praised the well-structured teaching programme and Half Day Release (HDR) sessions that adopted a variety of educational concepts and methodologies, and covered both specialist and holistic aspects of General Practice (GP) training.
- After qualification there are many opportunities for employment locally as either salaried GP or as partners in the area. Parts of Stoke-on-Trent are some of the most deprived in the West Midlands and so there are high levels of job satisfaction and also patient appreciation.
- Acclaimed academic and research centre based at the Medical School at Keele provides additional opportunities for involvement in research and medical student education.
South Staffordshire VTS (Stafford and Cannock)

The VTS scheme has focussed on delivering patient centred and compassionate training. The hospital delivers high quality medical education. The Hospital has become a part of the University Hospital of the North Midlands working alongside the Royal Stoke Hospital.

The vocational training scheme provides support and education for about 40 trainees. Uniquely, the Foundation Year 2 trainees in general practice are also invited to attend as this helps develop their skills and competences whether or not they later opt for general practice.

Health Education England Quality Assurance GP cluster visit in 2011 said;
- Trainees reported that they have good clinical exposure and practices ensure appropriate exposure is obtained when experience is lacking, which is appreciated by trainees.
- Trainees reported that all Educational Supervisors are very supportive and approachable.
- Trainees commended the excellent communication of the Educational Supervisors and they appreciate the pastoral support provided.

The recent 2016 Quality Assurance visit stated;
- The panel commended the Training Programme Director (TPD) team’s engagement with whole day regional ‘masterclasses’; the most recent pan-regional event, an Applied Knowledge Test (AKT) preparation course, was seen as being particularly useful and innovative.
- Trainees had high praise for County Hospital, which was considered very friendly and an enjoyable place to work.

Career prospects as a GP

There are plenty of salaried and partnership opportunities. For those looking for additional excitement and development, the area offers many innovative posts during training and also rolling on after completion of the training period.

Fellowships are being developed to cultivate interest in global health, education and training, and leadership. There are opportunities for both trainees and newly qualified GPs to work alongside colleagues from the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) focussing on Clinical Improvement.

Portfolio careers are supported by the local CCGs, local Federations, Community Education Provider Networks and OOH organisations. As in previous times, innovative ideas are flourishing. New models of care are being developed locally to ensure that 21st century general practice is satisfying safe and enjoyable.

Want to find out more?

Contact Dr David Palmer djl.palmer@nhs.net who will put you in contact with the appropriate person whether it be a current GP registrar, a newly qualified GP or TPD.
Staffordshire and Shropshire

We also have a Staffordshire and Shropshire GP Training on Facebook.

If you are applying to GP training and are looking for great hospital experience aimed at your needs as a GP trainee, followed by apprentice style training from urban/rural practices with experienced and quality approved trainers, then you should consider Staffordshire and Shropshire.

You will also have very good prospects of innovative and flexible employment as a salaried doctor, portfolio GP or partner in some of the most pleasant areas of Britain.