

# Working as an ophthalmologist

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

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

Ophthalmology provides a combination of medical and surgical work and offers a great deal of job satisfaction and it is particularly rewarding to enable people to see. Much of the pathology in the eye can be visualised, reducing reliance on laboratory tests in order to make a diagnosis. The surgery is delicate and challenging and the discipline itself is high-tech and constantly changing, with opportunities for practitioners to subspecialise or to maintain general interests.

I enjoy being able to make a real difference to patients like helping them improve their vision so that they can have a better quality of life.

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

It is necessary to possess good attention to detail, with first-rate motor skills and hand/foot/eye co-ordination. You should be able to communicate effectively with patients and colleagues, and work well with others. Entry to ophthalmology is highly competitive so you will require personal and academic qualities that stand out. Enthusiasm and commitment are essential attributes.

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

Most full-time ophthalmologists who work in both the public and private sectors divide their time evenly, and have eight clinics and two operating lists per week. A full time public hospital ophthalmologist would typically have five clinics and two operating lists each week, with the remaining time devoted to teaching, research and administration.

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

There will be increasing demand for services because of the population is ageing, and it will be essential for specialists to keep up with technological advances such as potential new drugs for the treatment of glaucoma and macular degeneration.

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

Entry to ophthalmology is competitive so applicants must be committee and it is a good idea to decide as early on as possible whether this is a career path that interests you. The specialty is academically challenging.

### **What are future opportunities in ophthalmology?**

Few positions are available in hospitals in the major centres, although there are plenty of opportunities in secondary centres.

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

It would be difficult to take time out to travel once you have embarked on the training programme, but it is possible beforehand or afterwards. Taking leave to have a baby or for other special reasons, either during training or in practice as a consultant, is accepted and supported. Part time training is not available.

It is important to focus on your studies during training, which reduces the amount of time you are able to spend with family and friends. For consultants, although the call work is limited and the hours are comparatively reasonable, the specialty is still demanding on time so it will inevitably impact on family life. Ophthalmology is considered to be a good specialty for anyone who wishes to work part time on a long-term basis.

**What are the disadvantages of the ophthalmology?**

According to registrars and consultants in Auckland, the only disadvantage with the specialty is the fact that it is so competitive to gain entry to the training programme.

**Any comments on the current training?**

The training programme has an excellent international reputation, and registrars are enthusiastic about the way the programme is run.