RC PSYCH
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

Be the brightest Be the best

What is **psychiatry?**

Psychiatry is a medical specialty dealing with people with a huge range of mental health conditions. As a psychiatrist, you'll help people to manage, treat or recover from them.

What can I specialise in?

There are six psychiatric specialties that you can formally train in which are approved by the GMC (General Medical Council):

- General adult psychiatry
- Forensic psychiatry
- Child and adolescent psychiatry
- Old age psychiatry
- Medical psychotherapy
- Intellectual disability psychiatry

You can either choose to train in one of these specialties or complete 'dual training' in two of them – approved specific combinations are available.

You can also choose to focus on a wide variety of specialist areas, including:

- Academic psychiatry
- Addictions psychiatry
- Eating disorders psychiatry
- Liaison psychiatry
- Neuropsychiatry
- Perinatal psychiatry
- Rehabilitation and social psychiatry

Rory Conn, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

"I will always recall my first exposure to psychiatry. I was a student in the liaison psychiatry team and I didn't know what to expect. The consultant took us for coffee and got to know us a little from the outset. No other consultant had ever done this and he put us all at ease. When we went to the medical ward to review a couple of patients, I'd never seen a doctor talk to their patients in the way he did – with such empathy and understanding. He was open, gentle and inquisitive – he knew how to conduct the examination to invite the patient to reveal very sensitive personal issues. It was like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle."

“I believe psychiatry is the specialty of the future”

General adult psychiatry

General adult psychiatrists normally treat ‘working age’ people who are experiencing a wide range of disorders, including psychoses, mood disorders, severe anxiety disorders and personality disorders. They work closely with other agencies and services within mental health and are an integral part of the team.

Working in general adult psychiatry allows you to maintain a varied practice but there are also many opportunities for you to subspecialise. You can work in a variety of settings including hospitals, community clinics and patients’ homes. You will work with a huge range of colleagues including nurses, other doctors and psychologists.

Knowledge of psychiatric disorders is developing, as are the treatments. General adult psychiatry is therefore a rapidly changing area of psychiatry and one that will allow significant personal development for those within it.

Forensic psychiatry

Forensic psychiatrists work at the interface between the law and psychiatry, managing patients with mental disorders who have been, or have the potential to be, violent. Forensic psychiatry offers a fascinating and diverse career that mainly involves treating offenders who have committed crimes when mentally ill or who become unwell in prison. You will work in a range of settings, including prisons, secure hospitals and within the community.

Child and adolescent psychiatry

As a psychiatrist in CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), most of your work will take place in outpatient settings and clinics, although there are some inpatient settings for patients in crisis or with serious mental health problems. You’ll work as part of a multidisciplinary service alongside other child mental health professionals. You will also work in liaison with schools, social services and other agencies.

Child and adolescent psychiatry is a fascinating specialty but is undersubscribed in comparison to paediatrics, with which it has a large cross-over. There are increasing opportunities to subspecialise, and to pursue other career-advancing activities, such as teaching or research, as well as your life outside psychiatry.

Saffron Homayoun, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Trainee

“I love psychiatry as a specialty, and I enjoy bringing everything together to treat my patients. In order to really treat someone, I need to bring schools, parents and social services on board to make sure that my patients get the most out of life. I believe psychiatry is the specialty of the future; it’s a developing field and there’s a lot on the horizon at the moment. Mental health is such an important area and it’s so exciting to be part of it. I’ve been encouraged to follow my interests and strengths and there have been so many opportunities since I chose psychiatry.”

“Being a psychiatrist is a privilege, you get to truly know a patient, sometimes more than their family will”

Dr Lade Smith

Old age psychiatry

Mental illness in older people is increasingly recognised as a significant concern. The complexity of interaction between physical, psychiatric and social problems experienced during old age requires close collaboration between a range of services.
There is a wide spectrum of disorders which will fall under the remit of mental health services for older people. It is not just about dementia care, although this is a significant, challenging and rewarding area of practice.
Old age psychiatry allows you to work with a broad range of professionals and draw on and develop your skills in psychiatry and general medicine.
The needs and vulnerabilities of older people, the range of work settings, and the broad scope of the medical, psychiatric and social predicaments encountered, sets the specialty apart from others.

Medical psychotherapy

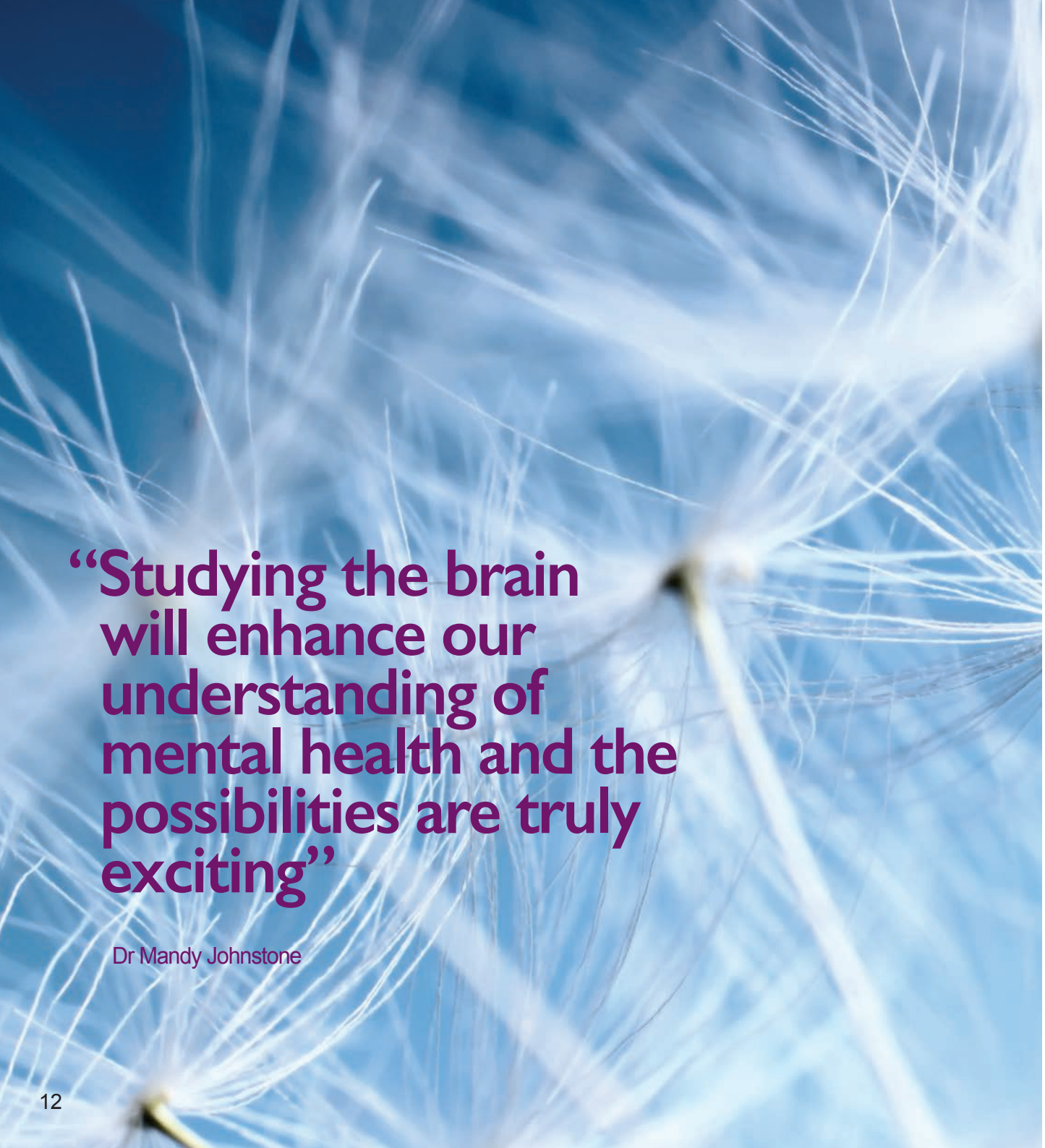
This field will appeal to those who want to specialise in talking therapies, with the patient or group as the focus of their work. Psychotherapy involves reflective practice and requires the psychiatrist to adapt their work to the patient they are treating. It also allows them to establish a meaningful relationship with those who are seeking help. In addition to treating the individual or group, medical psychotherapists also have a role supervising trainees and providing a therapeutic service to the mental health teams they work in.

Intellectual disability psychiatry

This area involves working with people with intellectual disabilities (also known as learning disabilities) who are much more likely than the general population to experience mental health conditions.
Intellectual disability psychiatrists treat severe mental illness as well as a range of other mental health conditions such as autistic spectrum disorders and anxiety disorders.
People with physical problems can often present non-specifically (for example with withdrawal or behaviour problems). Getting to the root of the cause is a fascinating diagnostic challenge.
It is also essential to consider the system around the person (such as family and support staff) to understand clinical problems.
In this field, you are very likely to be working in a community setting such as a clinic or someone’s home.

Ian Hall, Intellectual Disability Psychiatrist

“I work with some of the most vulnerable people whose mental health is complicated by communication issues and physical health conditions. It is so rewarding to use specialist clinical skills to work out what’s going on and find the best way to help improve people’s lives.”



"Studying the brain will enhance our understanding of mental health and the possibilities are truly exciting"

Dr Mandy Johnstone

Academic psychiatry

If you're interested in how research translates into clinical settings, you're likely to find academic psychiatry an interesting field.
Academic psychiatrists can be from any psychiatric specialty and they split their time between clinical work, research and/or teaching. The content and division of your time between jobs will vary depending on your location and speciality. You might be teaching undergraduates or postgraduates and, as with all roles in psychiatry, there will be opportunities to take on additional roles.
There are many areas you can research within psychiatry and your research can reflect your own interests. These areas might be:

- biological (for example, the genetics of psychiatric disorders)
- social (for example, the social factors that increase the risk for developing mental health problems)
- psychological (for example, research into different ways of thinking that may help or hinder how we deal with situations).

It's great to be able to see the influence of your research on practice or policy, and you'll always have something new and interesting to do. However, seeking funding for research can be challenging in any discipline.

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Grace Ofori-Attah, Addictions Psychiatrist and screenwriter

Grace Ofori-Attah is an award-winning screenwriter who was chosen for the BAFTA Elevate writing programme. She is also a consultant addictions psychiatrist, working flexibly across both of her interests.

"I find psychiatry inherently inspirational. My fascination with human behaviour, people and the mind drew me to the specialty. To me it is all about listening to people's stories, hearing about their lives and working out why they are the way they are. This has a lot of overlap with screenwriting. The two disciplines really complement each other, I think."

"I find psychiatry inherently inspirational"

Addictions psychiatry

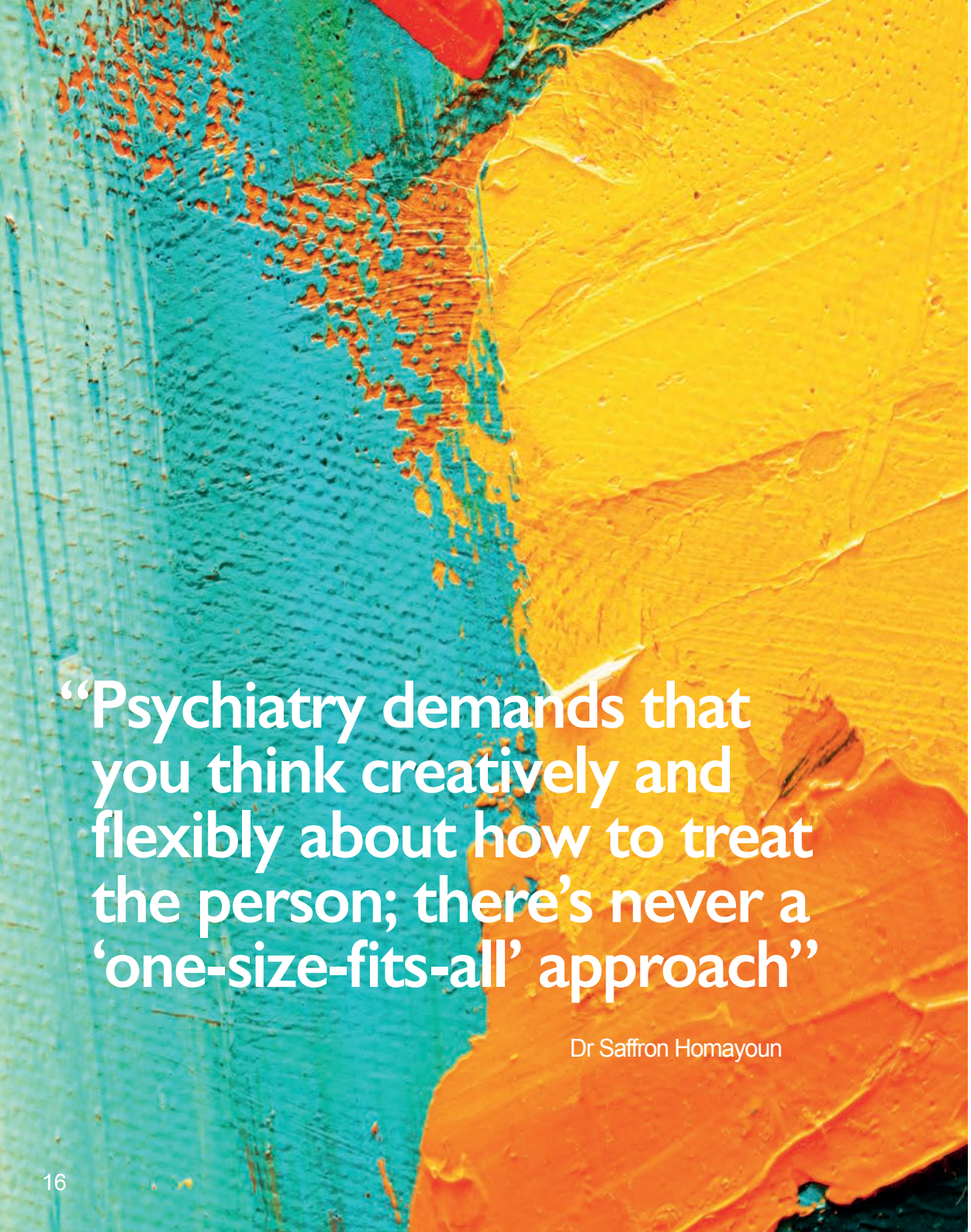
Working with people who have addictions means helping them stop or reduce their reliance on something and then maintain a new healthier lifestyle. As an addictions psychiatrist, you therefore need a good knowledge of physical health issues along with both psychological and physical treatment approaches. You're also likely to work with courts, probation services, and social and children's services. While it is true that many of the individuals you'll meet as an addictions psychiatrist come from areas of social deprivation, addiction problems affect all sections of society. It's a hugely varied field in which you can have a significant impact on the lives of patients and carers while being able to use a broad range of medical skills and work in a multidisciplinary setting.

Eating disorders psychiatry

As eating disorders typically start in adolescence, this area of psychiatry can often involve working with children and adolescents as well as with adults.
Many patients with eating disorders have other psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder or personality disorders. Physical complications and disabilities are also common.
Working in eating disorders requires knowledge and skills in various areas, including child and adolescent development, nutritional medicine and the neurobiology of hunger, and different psychological treatment models.
You'll work with acute medical and psychiatric emergencies but also with people with long-term impairments and disabilities, helping to keep them safe, prevent decline and support their quality of life.

Liaison psychiatry

Liaison psychiatrists bridge the gap between physical and psychological healthcare. They provide specialist mental health assessment and treatment for patients attending general hospitals and deal with a range of problems including self-harm, adjustment to illness, and physical and psychological co-morbidities.
The clinical content of liaison psychiatry practice is complex, and every day brings a new challenge.
Liaison psychiatrists also help support general hospital colleagues to improve their knowledge, skills and confidence in the basics of managing the common mental health problems that they encounter in their practice.



"Psychiatry demands that you think creatively and flexibly about how to treat the person; there's never a 'one-size-fits-all' approach"

Dr Saffron Homayoun

Neuropsychiatry

Neuropsychiatry is a growing specialist area, combining neurological and psychological aspects of illness. Neuropsychiatrists manage patients who develop a mental illness as well as patients who develop neurological symptoms that have a psychological cause (functional neurological disorder). Neuropsychiatry clearly links the science you learn at medical school with your clinical practice. More than with most other types of psychiatry, you will need a working knowledge of brain function to understand clinical conditions and devise treatments. As a neuropsychiatrist, you are likely to work in a hospital setting in a multi-disciplinary team with clinical neuroscientists and therapists.

Mandy Johnstone, Neuropsychiatrist

"I have always been interested in how the brain works. I'd say psychiatry is about complex problem-solving. Studying the brain will enhance our understanding of mental health and the possibilities are truly exciting."

Karl Scheeres, Perinatal Psychiatrist

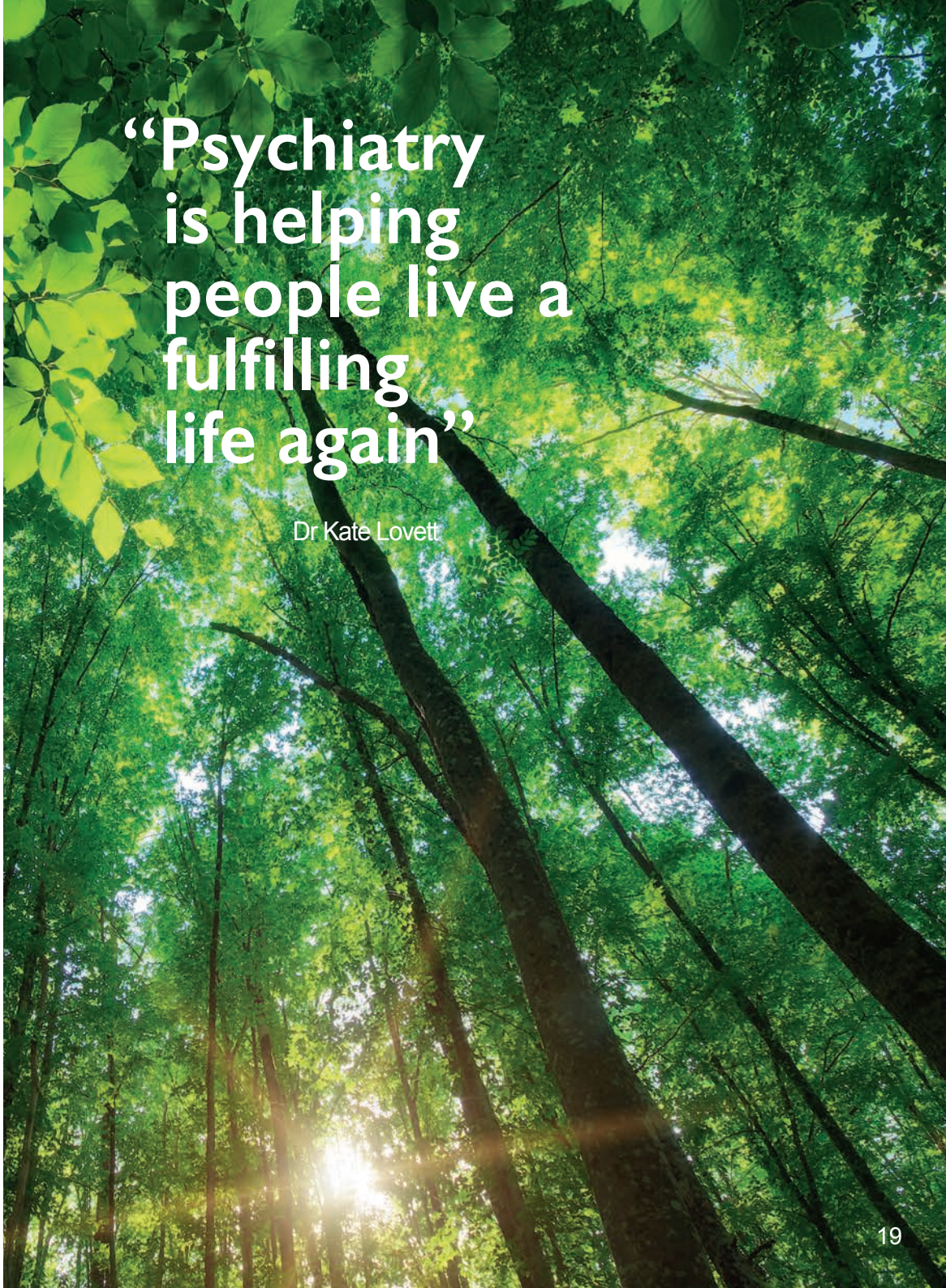
"I am a part-time consultant perinatal psychiatrist in Bristol, where I work three days a week. Choosing psychiatry as a specialty definitely allowed me to balance my work and home life. I was the first man in my trust to apply for paternity leave, and no one questioned my decision to take six months off from my registrar post to care for my daughter. Balancing home and work life is challenging, and there is a lot of juggling involved. I often have a backlog of work when I start in the middle of the week but being able to spend quality time together as a family and build a bond with my children makes it worth the challenge."

Perinatal psychiatry

Perinatal psychiatrists treat people at an extremely sensitive period in their lives − around pregnancy and after childbirth. An episode of illness at this time has a profound effect on the patient, their relationships, family and child. Perinatal services vary across the country, but tend to comprise both Mother and Baby Units and specialist community mental health teams. Perinatal psychiatrists work in a multidisciplinary team, and also work closely with health visitors, midwives, general practitioners and obstetricians.

Rehabilitation and social psychiatry

Rehabilitation psychiatry focuses on the needs of people with longer-term and complex mental health problems. The term 'recovery' is now often used to emphasise the need to focus on quality of life rather than simply relief from symptoms. This field involves working with people's families and wider social circles to promote integration, or reintegration, into the local community. Individuals' values and beliefs must be respected and integrated into treatment plans. Most commonly, service users in this area have had a significant period of contact with mental health services and generally will have psychotic illnesses which have not been easy to treat. Psychiatrists are therefore required to take a broad view of an individual's wellbeing, work closely with other organisations and look to create improvement in life rather than expect simple solutions and quick results.



Becoming a **psychiatrist**

Training path

Most trainees in the UK follow the training path laid out in the diagram below. There are some exceptions and alternatives to this which are discussed on the next page.

4 – 6 Years

Medical school

The first step is to get a medical degree (MBBS, MBChB).
To secure a place at medical school, you'll need at least three good A-Levels, including one or more science subjects (chemistry is compulsory at most medical schools).
For more information on how to get into medical school, refer to the useful resources section at the end of this booklet.

2 Years

Foundation training

Although you will be training all the way through your two-year foundation programme, you will also be working which means you will be getting paid too.
You will complete a number of training posts, each lasting a few months. Throughout the programme, you'll gain experience in a number of different medical specialties, such as GP, psychiatry and surgery.
There is more information about the Foundation Programme in the useful resources section at the end of this booklet.

3 Years

Core training

During core psychiatry training, you will work and train in a number of different specialties within psychiatry. This way, you will gain a broad understanding of the specialty.
Core training lasts 3 years – referred to as CT1, CT2 and CT3. By the end of CT3, you need to have completed your Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists exam in order to apply to the next stage of training.
There are two opportunities per year to apply to core psychiatry.

3 Years

Higher training

Higher psychiatry training normally takes 3 years – referred to as ST4, ST5 and ST6.
During those 3 years, your training will reflect the subspecialty you have chosen. At the end of your training, you will receive your CCT (Certificate of Completion of Training) and you will be entered onto the GMC's specialist register.

Senior post

When you have completed your training and joined the GMC's specialist register, you can apply for consultant psychiatrist posts or you may choose to spend some time pursuing other professional interests in an SAS post. These posts will be at a senior level and may include opportunities to participate in management and training in addition to your clinical duties.

Other options for training

Below are some other options that you may wish to consider while pursuing psychiatric training.

Child and adolescent psychiatry run-through training*

You may be able to apply for run-through training which means you apply once for a training post at CT1 level and then do not need to apply again at ST4. This trial programme guarantees you complete both core and higher training in one region and is currently only available in child and adolescent psychiatry.
Your programme will include time in paediatrics and you'll be assigned a senior child psychiatrist as a mentor.
For further information, visit the Health Education England North West website.

*information correct at time of publication (September 2018)

Out of programme

During training, it is possible to take time out of your specialty training to undertake 'out of programme experience' (OOPE). There are a number of different types of OOPE available which you may use to gain experience in a different setting, undertake some training abroad or complete some research.

Military careers

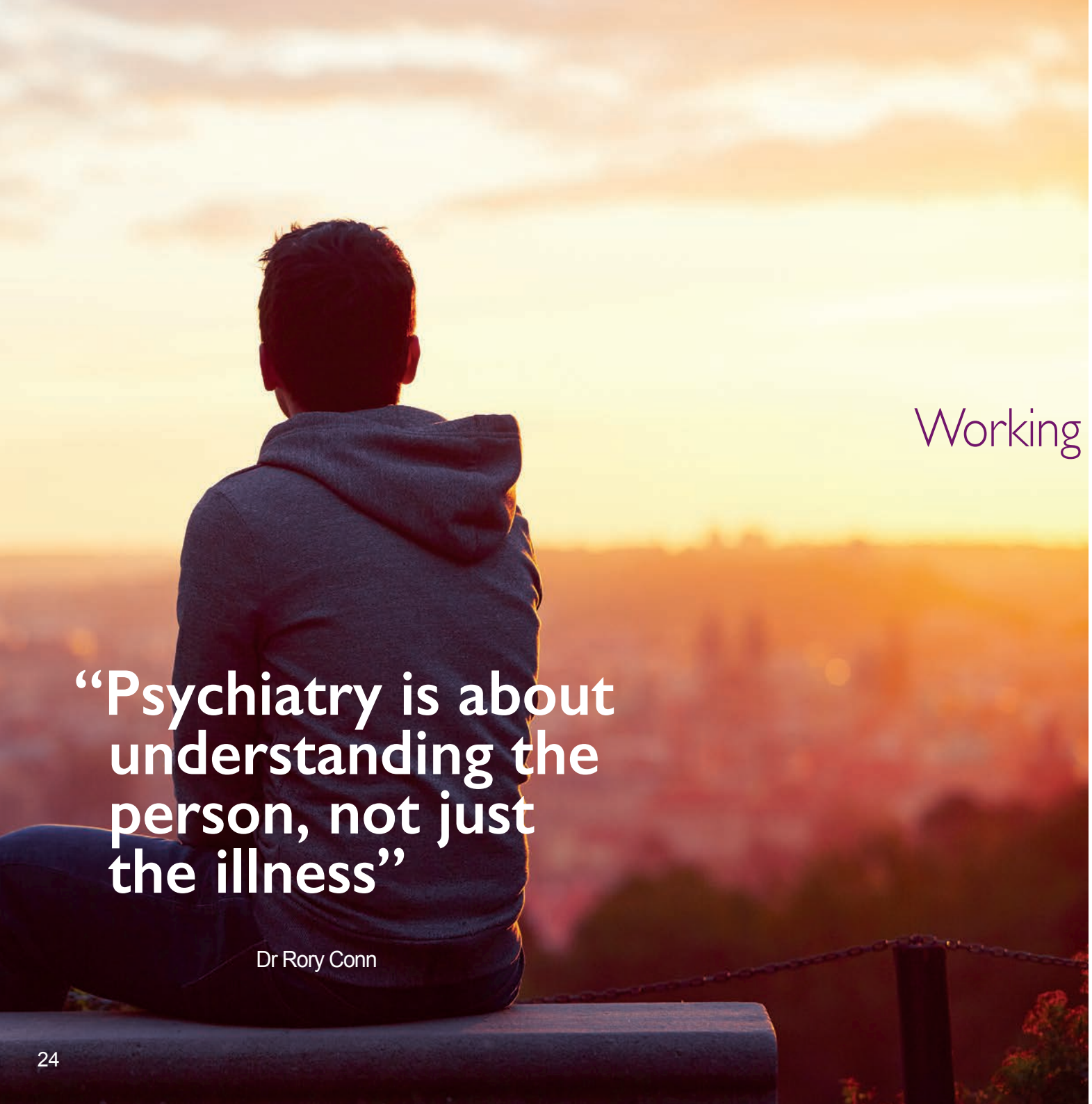
The Defence Medical Services (DMS) employs civilian and military doctors to deliver medical care in the Army, Royal Air Force (RAF) and Royal Navy in the UK and overseas. The range of services provided by DMS includes primary healthcare, rehabilitation, occupational medicine, community mental healthcare and specialist medical care. There are career opportunities for civilians or those serving in the Armed Forces as full-time regulars or part-time reservists.
Please see our resources page for more information.

How to apply for training posts

Recruitment for both core and higher training is run centrally by Health Education North West. To apply for a training post, you will need to make sure you meet the requirements of the person specification and complete an online application form (via the Oriel website). For core training, you will also need to complete the Multi-Specialty Recruitment Assessment (MSRA). Interviews are held for both core and higher training and you will need to prepare a portfolio containing information about, and evidence of, your experience and training in psychiatry to date. Information about how to apply to both core and higher psychiatry training is available from the North West Deanery.

Lt Colonel Elizabeth Hunt, Military Psychiatrist

I always had a curiosity about soldiers and how their experience of warfare affected them as individuals while still having to act for the 'greater good'. I work as a consultant psychiatrist and clinical lead for a multi-disciplinary team of civilian and military professionals. A significant proportion of the patients I see are experiencing post traumatic stress disorder. I find this particularly rewarding to treat as while the individuals and their families are often suffering greatly when I first see them, their conditions are often very treatable and it is so thrilling to see them become well again. My work is dynamic and I enjoy the stability of having a continual employer, the possibility of deployment and travel, and working with a variety of staff in various workplace settings.



"Psychiatry is about understanding the person, not just the illness"

Dr Rory Conn

Working as a **psychiatrist**

When you have completed your training, you will receive your Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) and you will be entered onto the GMC's specialist register. This means that you can apply for consultant posts.

As a consultant psychiatrist, you are able to work independently, although you will still be working in a team. You may also lead a team of other professionals in managing the care of patients.

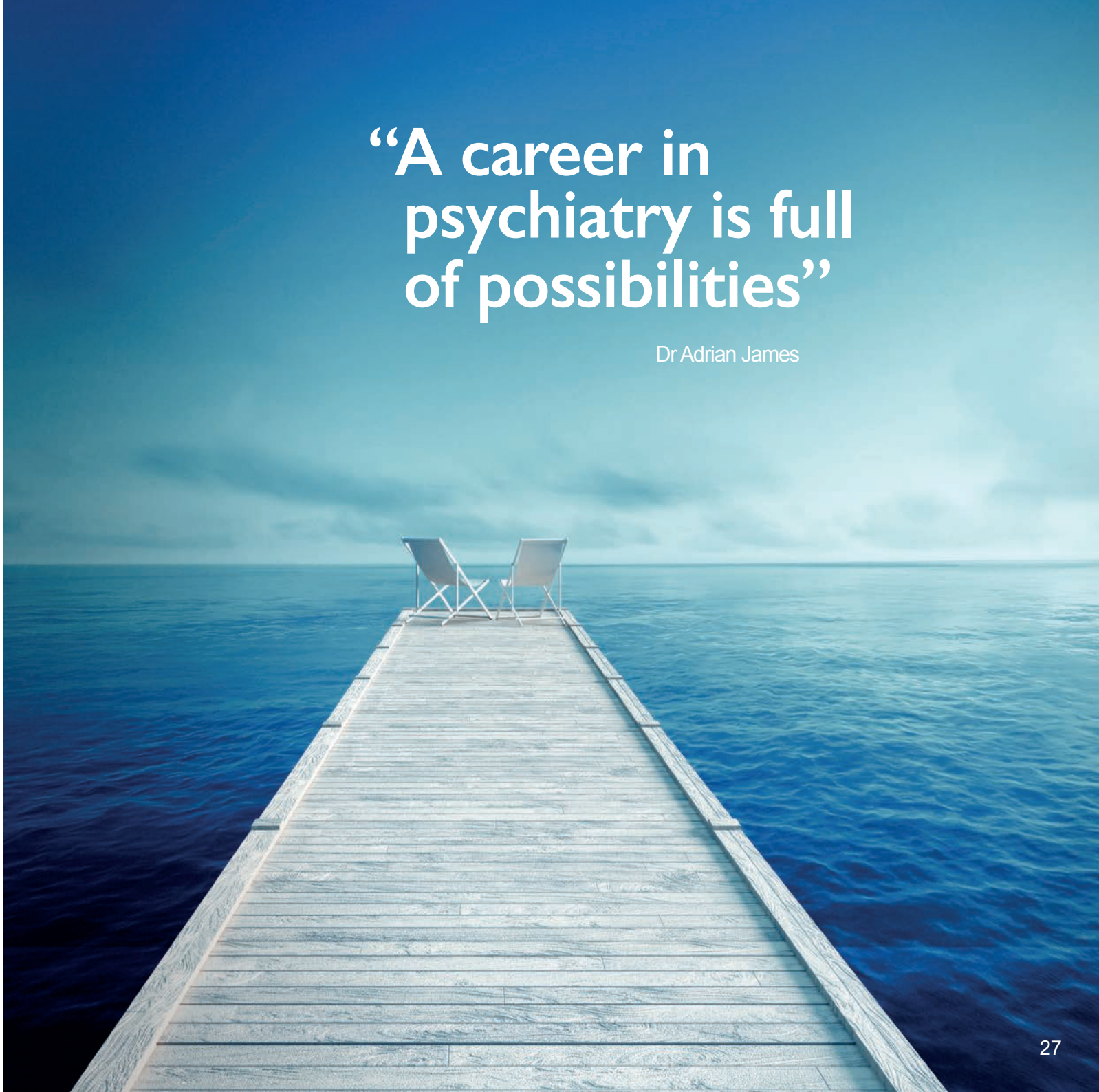
At this point in your career, you may also want to develop other work interests such as medico-legal work, teaching and training, or management and leadership.

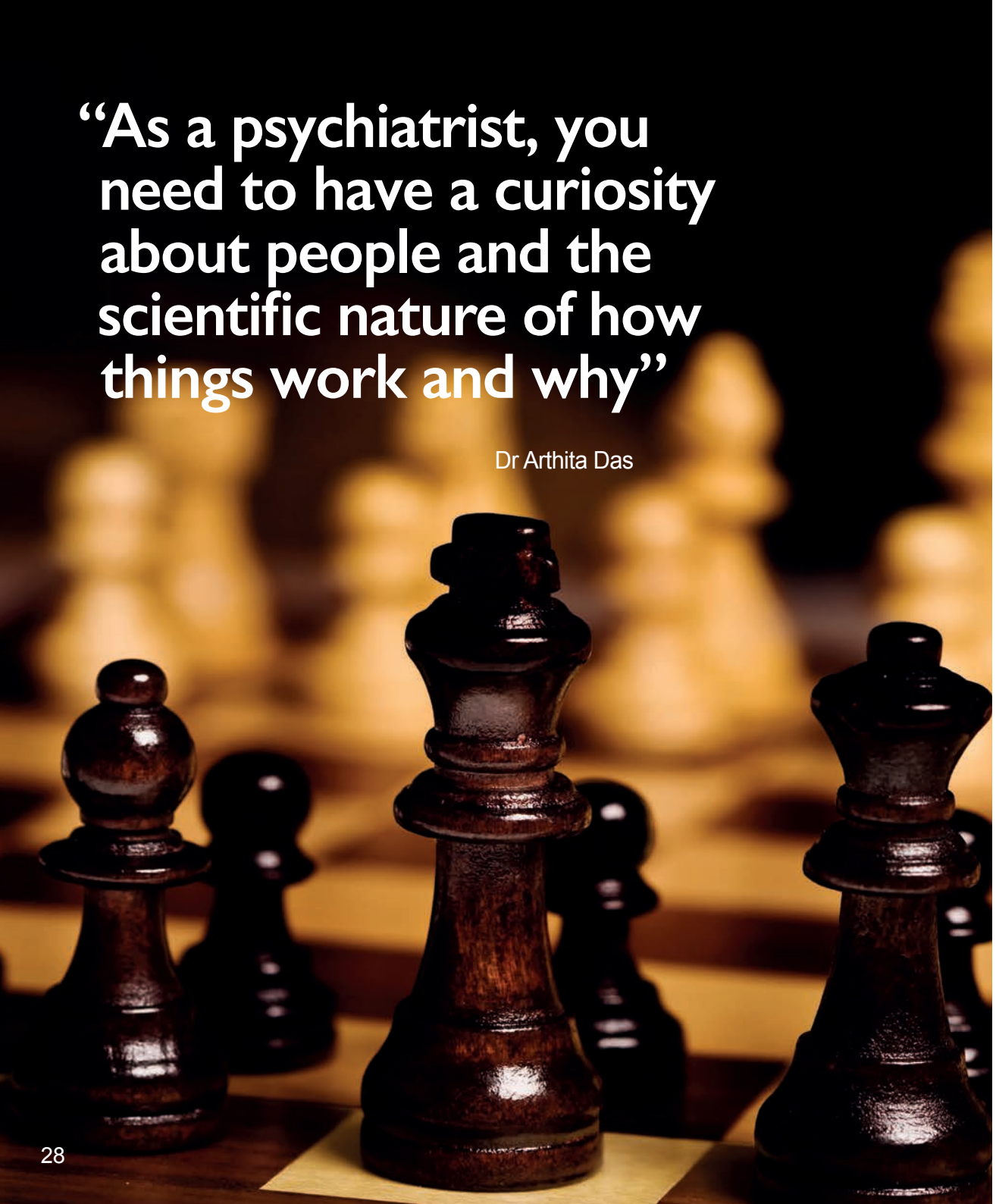
Specialty and associate specialist (SAS) doctor posts

A significant number of doctors working in psychiatry are neither trainees nor consultants, and are known as specialty and associate specialist (SAS) doctors. They make up approximately 20% of the workforce within the NHS alone and play a vital role in the NHS and private sector. Doctors may have chosen SAS posts rather than training or consultant posts for a variety of reasons.
SAS doctors are a diverse group with regard to their level of knowledge, clinical skills, training and needs (both in terms of career development and training). SAS doctors are required to be responsible to a named consultant psychiatrist and form an important part of the psychiatric team.

Flexible training and working

Whether you are training or in a consultant or SAS post, there are opportunities to work flexibly or part time. Less-than-full-time (LTFT) training is becoming increasingly popular and the demand for such training has been steadily increasing. If you wish to train LTFT, you can apply to your deanery to do this. Flexible working arrangements can be negotiated locally and may include job sharing, part-time working or a range of other working patterns.





"As a psychiatrist, you need to have a curiosity about people and the scientific nature of how things work and why"

Dr Arthita Das

What **next?**

If you're at school: You will need to take relevant subjects to apply to medical school. Think about what else you can do to support your application − consider voluntary work experience in caring environments, extracurricular activities or hobbies involving working in a team.

If you're a medical student: Join RCPsych as a student associate member − it's free and offers you great benefits (rcpsych.ac.uk/studentassociate). Prepare for your next job application by looking at person specifications and starting to build your portfolio. You could look at fellowships, bursaries, electives in related specialties or talk to senior colleagues about research opportunities or interests.

If you're a foundation trainee: Join RCPsych as a foundation doctor associate member − it's free and provides great opportunities for development (rcpsych.ac.uk/studentassociate). Identify gaps in your portfolio and work to fill them. You could attend events, undertake research projects, complete an audit or pursue a range of other activities. Make the most of your placements and discuss your career plans with your senior colleagues or mentors.

Useful **resources**

Careers resources:

- Health Careers: healthcareers.nhs.uk/
- NHS Careers: healthcareers.nhs.uk
- BMA Specialising in Psychiatry: bma.org.uk
- Royal Airforce: raf.mod.uk/recruitment/roles/roles-finder/medical-and-medical-support/medical-officer
- Royal Navy: royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/roles-and-specialisations/services/surface-fleet/medical-officer
- Army: apply.army.mod.uk/roles/army-medical-service/doctor

Applying to medical school:

- Medical Schools' Council: medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine
- Health Careers: healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/applying-medical-school
- British Medical Association: bma.org.uk/advice/career
- Foundation Programme: foundationprogramme.nhs.uk

College resources:

- Choose Psychiatry: rcpsych.ac.uk/choosepsychiatry
- Psychiatrists Support Service: rcpsych.ac.uk/members/psychiatristssupportservice.aspx
- Psychiatric Trainees' Committee: rcpsych.ac.uk/traininpsychiatry/yourtraining/psychiatrictrainingcommittee.aspx
- Portfolio online: rcpsych.ac.uk/traininpsychiatry/yourtraining/trainingresources/portfolioonline.aspx
- TrOn (Trainees Online training modules): rcpsych.ac.uk/traininpsychiatry/yourtraining/trainingresources/traineesonline.aspx
- CPD Online: rcpsych.ac.uk/usefulresources/publications/cpdonline.aspx

Recruitment resources:

- National Psychiatry Recruitment: nwpgmd.nhs.uk/national_Psychiatry_Recruitment
- Specialty Recruitment HEE: specialtytraining.hee.nhs.uk/Recruitment
- Oriel (application website): oriel.nhs.uk

Join the College

- Register as a student or foundation doctor associate: rcpsych.ac.uk/studentassociate
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists membership: rcpsych.ac.uk/usefulresources/membership.aspx

CHOOSE PSYCHIATRY

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