

Day in the life of a paediatric allergy registrar

Dr Liz Powell



1. Day in the life of a paediatric allergy registrar

A typical day may involve initial attendance at paediatric handover particularly if covering on call later and to attend paediatric teaching. There may then be a weekly multidisciplinary paediatric allergy meeting including teaching and patient discussions. Following this some administration time to prepare for the afternoon clinic. Typical cases in the general paediatric allergy clinic include food allergy, allergic rhinitis and chronic urticaria. Other days there are food and drug challenges, or immunotherapy clinic. As this is an outpatient specialty predominantly it is usually possible to manage my time to leave by 1730 if I am not on a long day.

2. What made you decide on paediatric allergy?

I recognised in my paediatric training the difference a comprehensive outpatient assessment and management of conditions such as eczema, asthma and food allergies can make. I enjoy that a lot of aspects of allergy are common conditions in general paediatrics, and the difference you can make with a holistic approach. I enjoy interacting with a multi-disciplinary team including nurse specialists, dieticians and psychologists, and also working with other disciplines such as dermatology, respiratory and ENT. In paediatric allergy training there is exposure to immunology and infectious diseases which are specialties which also interested me. I welcomed the research opportunities within this discipline.

3. What training do you have to do to get into your specialty?

There are two routes into paediatric allergy – both during ST6-8 in paediatric training. Initially you do the first 5 years of training (ST1-5 (although this will be reduced to 4 years in the future)) and then you can apply to GRID training where you train in paediatric allergy in ST6-8 alongside paediatric on calls, or you can do SPIN training where you do a year in paediatric allergy during ST6-8 as a specialist interest alongside further general paediatric training. The expected outcome would be that GRID training leads to a post in paediatric allergy whereas following SPIN training you would apply to a general paediatric consultant post with allergy as your specialist interest.

4. What was your first experience of the specialty like?

It was initially quite a change to be in a heavily outpatient-based setting. However, I soon got used to this and enjoy managing my time to enable attendance at training opportunities such as other subspecialty clinics. I found it satisfying working with families where their

child has several different co-morbidities to improve their quality of life. I learnt a considerable amount from different members of the multi-disciplinary team.

5. Do you work closely with other specialties?

We share patients with several other specialties – including respiratory, dermatology, gastroenterology and ENT. There are often joint clinics provided between these specialities in allergy services. I have been able to be part of service evaluations in order to provide evidence for the need for such clinics. As part of the paediatric allergy training, you have to attend a certain number of these clinics (approximately 6 months equivalent to ensure you have sufficient experience in these areas).

6. Is it family friendly?

Paediatric allergy is family friendly in that the time you leave is usually more predictable. However, you continue on a paediatric rota until you complete your training so there remains shift work, the pattern of the on-call rota varies depending on the hospital you are at.

7. Are there opportunities for travel?

There are opportunities to travel to conferences (usually, they are currently virtual in the pandemic). In addition, there can be opportunities to spend time at another service's clinic to gain experience you wouldn't achieve at your base hospital.

8. Are there opportunities for research?

Paediatric allergy is a very active area in terms of research such as allergy prevention and oral food immunotherapy. Several trainees had already completed a PhD prior to applying to GRID, but you can also take out of programme time (OOPR) to complete research during your allergy training.

9. Do you work closely with other healthcare groups?

I work closely with our nurse specialists, dieticians and psychologists. It is fantastic to work together as a team, and I have completed several clinical guidelines, audits and patient information leaflets working together with members of the MDT.

10. What are the best aspects of working in your specialty?

I enjoy the multi-disciplinary team set up and the mix of different conditions and types of clinic. It is satisfying to manage patients with multiple allergic co-morbidities and work with the families to improve their condition. I particularly enjoy teaching allergy to paediatric trainees and have been involved in an anaphylaxis education programme using simulation.

11. Is there a typical working location for your specialty?

This depends on the type of training. GRID is a national application process and depending on the post you get; you may work in a single tertiary hospital for ST6-8 or for example in London rotate with a year in each of three hospitals. If you undertake a SPIN, at least part of this will usually include a year in paediatric allergy in the tertiary hospital in the region of your deanery.

12. What other jobs, working groups, roles, societies, charities, or publications have you been involved in?

I have been paediatric BSACI trainee rep for the last 3 years and on the BSACI Standards of Care Committee as trainee rep. I have worked on the Royal College Paediatrics and Child Health curriculum for SPIN in paediatric allergy. I have published paediatric allergy education articles and presented posters at BSACI and EAACI conferences. I have worked as a group to provide monthly virtual paediatric allergy grand rounds hosted by BSACI.

13. What advice would you give someone considering your specialty?

The conditions we see in paediatric allergy are also seen in general paediatrics so you will have had some exposure to these. I would aim to gain experience and attend paediatric allergy clinics to get more exposure to the specialty to help to find out if you would enjoy working in this area but also to show on your application that you are interested. There are some great education days available such as the Allergy Academy days and also there is likely a regional network for paediatric allergy in your area and you could join their education days. Speak to paediatric allergy trainees – you can get in touch with myself via the BSACI website, and we have a WhatsApp group for paediatric trainees interested in allergy, where you can ask other trainees for more information and tips.