The Intensive Care Doctor

Who is this guide useful for?

This guide is aimed at medical students and junior doctors considering a career in intensive care medicine (ICM). Tough career choices have to be made increasingly earlier by foundation doctors who have often not had significant exposure to the many varied specialties that medicine can offer. This guide is a taster of what life is like as an intensive care medicine doctor, the exciting possibilities that training in this specialty can open up and tips on how to get more exposure to the work we do.

Introduction

Intensive care medicine as a specialty has changed significantly over the past decade. The creation of a new Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine (FICM) as well as stand-alone training posts has refocused ideals of what ICM training should deliver and the skills and aptitudes required for a career in this specialty.

The training programme in ICM helps doctors deepen their understanding of basic sciences and the clinical application of this to the resuscitation, stabilization and ongoing care of critically ill patients. Technical skills required for advanced organ support such as vascular access, intubation and tracheostomy placement are complemented by non-technical skills such as communication, situational awareness and triage.

It is a rewarding, varied job allowing you in one day to be resuscitating a poly-trauma patient admitted to the emergency department, performing a tracheostomy on a patient on the ICU, discussing end-of-life care with a patient’s relatives, and assessing a deteriorating patient on the ward.

Where do we work?

Our role in optimizing and coordinating the care of critically ill patients involves not just those patients admitted to the ICU but spans many hospital departments. As ICM specialists we have close contact with teams across the hospital and working with a number of different doctors and allied health professionals as well as the wider support staff is a real perk of the day-to-day work.

The Intensive Care Unit (ICU)

The majority of our time is spent in the ICU, providing organ support for critically ill patients. For example this could be in the form of intubation and ventilation for respiratory failure or renal replacement therapy for acute kidney injury to cardiovascular support with inotropes guided by cardiac output monitoring. We are also diagnosticians with a broad overview of the patient’s physiological responses to their disease pathology and co-ordinate ongoing input from other specialists involved in the patient’s care. In addition to day-to-day provision of
critical care we are also involved in outreach services and education, clinical governance, organ donation and post-ICU rehabilitation.

Subspecialties

A career in intensive care medicine can encompass a wide variety of specialist interests. These can be explored as part of training and expanded during the special skills year. The special skills training curriculum currently includes:

- Academia and research
- Neuro intensive care medicine
- Cardiac intensive care medicine
- Echocardiography
- Extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO)
- Paediatric intensive care medicine (PICM)
- Pre-hospital emergency medicine (PHEM)
- Transfer medicine
- Quality Improvement in healthcare
- Home ventilation

Information about what subspecialty training involves and a personal insight into subspecialty careers can be found on the ICS website.

Recruitment to ICM

Recruitment for ICM is run nationally through the West Midlands Deanery. The application process described by a recently appointed trainee can be found here and further information and FAQs can be accessed here.

In addition to foundation training, entry to single CCT ICM requires core training in one of the following:

- Acute Care Common Stem Training (ACCS)
- Core Anaesthetic Training (CAT)
- Core Medical Training (CMT)

As well as a pass in one of the following examinations:

- MCEM (full)
- FRCA (primary)
- MRCP (full)

With extended training it is possible to gain Dual CCT by combining specialty training in ICM with one of the following:

- Acute Medicine
- Anaesthesia
- Emergency Medicine
- Renal Medicine
- Respiratory Medicine

Stages of Training
Stage 1: ST3-4
- Completion of core competencies not covered by entry core training, as well as ICM experience.

Stage 2: ST5-6
- Subspecialty ICM: cardiothoracic ICM, paediatric ICM, neuro ICM
- Further general ICM
- Special skills year (single CCT) or parent specialty (dual CCT)
- FFICM final examination

Stage 3: ST7
- Advanced ICM experience to further develop high-level clinical and non-clinical skills in preparation for consultancy.

The ficm website has complete and up-to-date information about stages of ICM training, the ICM curriculum and assessments as well as the FFICM examinations.

**LTFT training**

If you are considering less than full time training you may have health issues or commitments outside of the work environment that require your time whilst still wanting to get the most out of your ICM training. ICM programme directors and LTFT representatives can provide ongoing support and advice regarding application for and continued training as a LTFT trainee in ICM and further information can be found on the ICS website here.

**Want to know more?**

These are exciting times for our rapidly expanding, varied and exciting specialty and if you have been inspired to find out more there are many ways!

Often students and junior doctors have had limited exposure to life as a critical care doctor and may want to gain a bit more insight before making an application to start on an ICM career path. There are various ways to go about this depending on previous experience and where you are up to in your training. Many medical schools offer undergraduate special study modules or attachments in critical care and it is worth enquiring early, as they are often popular! Medical students are always welcome on the critical care unit and valuable skills and attributes can be gained to help decrease the stress of starting foundation jobs!!

Electives in critical care are also a useful way of gaining additional exposure as an undergraduate and there may be links between your university and hospitals around the world.

Some foundation programmes offer rotations that include critical care or the opportunity to organize “taster weeks” on the ICU. This experience can provide a unique insight into life in intensive care medicine as well as providing the
opportunity to gain valuable skills and confidence in looking after critically ill patients in a highly supported environment.

**Talk to us!**

We are an approachable and friendly group of professionals and keen to spread our passion about providing high quality, safe care to our patient population. As well as talking to ICM trainees and consultants on the job, for aspiring intensivists it is also useful to arrange to speak with the FICM college tutor in your hospital. They will be able to offer up-to-date advice about job applications and training opportunities.

Career days for ICM provide a one-stop tour of ICM training, career opportunities within ICM and advice about recruitment into our specialty. Information about the next ICS career day can be found [here](#).

Intensive care medicine is an exciting, inspiring and fulfilling career. It requires hard work, dedication and skill but is hugely rewarding. If you are interested in joining us in a career in critical care, be inquisitive and get as much experience as you can to be able to make an informed choice and increase your chances of securing a job.

**Best of luck!**

# Dr Kate Tizard

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