What general practice is

General practice is a challenging and interesting specialty. In most cases General Practitioners (GPs) are the first point of contact for the patient’s health problems. There is a wide diversity, not only in the type of conditions that GPs see, but also in the stages at which they present. GPs see and treat a lot of common conditions, but they also see rare conditions particularly at an early stage.

GPs are expert diagnosticians responsible for differentiating and prioritising an array of otherwise undifferentiated problems that are brought in by the patients. They make selective use of the wide range of diagnostic modalities and health care resources available at their disposal.

GPs derive tremendous satisfaction from the long-term trusting relationships that they form with their patients. Unlike in other specialties, the doctor-patient relationship in general practice is not limited by the nature of the illness, the life stage of the patient, or the treatment modalities offered by the doctor. This also means that general practice is an ideal setting to offer preventative care and public health promotion.

What general practice isn’t

Medical students and junior doctors often have a misconception that GPs are the equivalent of Resident Medical Officers (RMOs) in the community and they manage only the trivial conditions (like coughs and colds) and refer the rest. If this is not true, then what do GPs do during the day?

Let’s take a look:

• Yes, they manage coughs and colds, check blood pressure and issue repeat prescriptions

But GPs also:

• Perform procedures – removal of skin tumours, incision and drainage of an abscess, implanon insertion, etc
• Counsel and manage patients with depression and anxiety
• Conduct health checks and assessments
• Diagnose and manage of new breast lumps
• Diagnose and manage children with eczema and asthma
• Follow up and titrate medications for a patient with poorly controlled diabetes
• Visit to a residential aged care facility to see a patient with worsening confusion
• Home visit to an elderly patient with abdominal pain
• And much, much more

As you can see there is tremendous variety in general practice. Contrary to popular belief, they see and manage plenty of serious and potentially life threatening conditions.

“General practice has been a completely different style of medicine to what I expected. It has opened many opportunities that I hadn’t even realised existed.”

Dr Vandana Pala

“Being a GP is more than what I thought it would be. GPs are often painted as script renewers/antibiotic prescribers, but they are much more than that. You are the first point of call, and the aim is not only to provide primary care, but also secondary and tertiary prevention strategies.

It is one of the few medical careers that offers a variety of challenging presentations that draw from all aspects of medicine.

I see everything and each day is different to the last.”

Dr Peter Ly

Recently fellowed GP Synergy registrar

Dr Vandana Pala
How to become a GP

GP training
The most common way to become a GP is to apply to the Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) program.

The AGPT program is generally a 3 or 4 year program. There are two fellowship endpoints which trainees can choose from – the Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and/or the Fellowship of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (FACRRM).

In the AGPT program, trainees undertake their training with a Regional Training Provider (RTP) in rural or urban environments, or in a combination of the two.

Training itself occurs in a combination of hospital and community based GP settings, under the supervision of experienced GPs and clinicians. Trainees are supported by their RTP who provide education, feedback, guidance and advice.

To reach fellowship, trainees are required to participate in exams and meet training requirements.

Doctors can apply to the AGPT program from as early as intern year.

For more information visit the AGPT website – www.agpt.com.au

GP Synergy
GP Synergy is one of seventeen RTPs in Australia. We offer prevocational and vocational GP training across a large part of Sydney and in the New England/Northwest region of NSW.

We have a reputation for excellence which stems from a commitment to quality education provision and in-practice supervision.

Within our boundaries we offer a diverse range of urban and rural training experiences for doctors seeking to achieve either fellowship endpoint.

We also provide a range of prevocational placements where junior doctors can experience general practice in accredited teaching practices in Sydney or northern NSW.

To help medical students explore general practice we work closely with the universities located in our boundaries (UND, UNE, UNSW, USYD and UWS) to create opportunities where medical students can meet and learn from GPs and GP registrars.

For more information about us, please visit our website – www.gpsynergy.com.au

"GP Synergy provided me with the skills and confidence to practise in the real world. Throughout my training I was supported by a great team of enthusiastic educators and mentors."

Dr Kylie Vuong
Fellowed GP Synergy general pathway registrar

"My GP Synergy rural training experience has been part of the best experience of my life. I was exposed to a wide range of clinical presentations and the supervision I received was excellent."

Dr Charles Piao
Recently fellowed rural pathway registrar
General practice and you

How to maximise your GP placement

Most medical programs now include a GP community based placement. Even if you’re not considering a career in general practice, it’s important to understand how the primary health care environment cares for patients before and after a hospital stay.

Your community placement experience will depend on many things – the type of practice, the supervisor and also you! Generally, the more you embrace the placement, the more you will get out of it.

To maximise your GP experience:

Be an active learner
- During consultations/shadowing, write down questions and the possible diagnosis
- Ask questions – why things were done a certain way, etc

Show genuine interest in the practice
- Get to know practice staff, including the practice manager, practice nurse, allied health professionals, etc
- Look for opportunities to learn/shadow from these staff
- Ask to accompany your supervisor or other staff on home visits, nursing home visits or other appointments

Be considerate
- Be flexible – think about what you would like to see/do but understand any limitations and practice requirements
- Consider your supervisor (they might need a break now and then)
- Be aware of your university expectations and requirements

Useful resources for your placement

There are a number of resources which you might find useful to access during your community placement:

- RACGP Online Guidelines: www.racgp.org.au
- RACGP “Red Book” – guidelines on preventative activities in general practice: www.racgp.org.au
- Diabetes Management in General Practice: www.racgp.org.au
- Cochrane Library
- Therapeutic Guidelines (available through most university libraries)
- MIMS Online (available through most university libraries)
- Murtagh’s General Practice
- Patient Education (Murtagh)
- Practice Tips Online (Murtagh)
- BMJ Best Practice (evidence based resource from UK – iPhone / Smartphone mobile website available on signing up): www.bestpractice.bmj.com

How to find out more about GP

There are a number of ways you can find out more about a career in general practice:

Apply for a GP Synergy General Practice Scholarship

GP Synergy offers funded scholarships for medical students in any stage of learning to pursue their interest in general practice and academic general practice. For more detailed information please visit our website – www.gpsynergy.com.au

Join your GP Student Network (GPSN)

Located at universities around the country, these clubs run GP focused events and activities where you can meet and learn from GPs. Sign up at www.gpsn.org.au

Sign up to the GP Synergy mailing list

GP Synergy sends regular updates about all things GP and GP training, including details of medical student educational events. Sign up at www.gpsynergy.com.au

Join RACGP or ACRRM


Consider a prevocational GP rotation

When you reach your hospital training, consider undertaking an accredited 10/11 week rotation in General Practice. More information about these rotations can be found on our website – www.gpsynergy.com.au

It’s important for all clinicians to understand how the primary health care environment works.

“During my placement I saw a huge variety of clinical cases – every patient was a new challenge, and required integration of all branches of medicine. Our sessions were never boring, as there was always a different case waiting behind the door.”

Dr David Tian
Medical student reflecting on his GP placement
Would you like to know more about GP Synergy or GP training?

Visit our website: www.gpsynergy.com.au

Find out more about training with GP Synergy, explore our training regions, review the profiles of our training practices, supervisors, staff, and more.

Contact us: 02 9818 4433

We are happy to answer your queries about GP Synergy or GP training anytime. Call us on (02) 9818 4433 or send us an email: applicant@gpsynergy.com.au

GP Synergy would like to thank Dr Joel Rhee from the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales for his contribution to this publication.