## **GUIDE TO GP CAREER CHOICES**

Dr Nicola Gill



**There are many paths you can choose to take on your career in general practice.**

**This guide has been written to help you choose the right path for you.**

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# Guide to GP Career Choices

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If you are on the GMC GP Register and a Local Area Performers Team/ PCT Performers List, you are eligible to work as a GP anywhere in the UK.

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Historically once a doctor entered general practice they became a principal and worked on in the same post until retirement.

The 1990 GP contract and 1997 NHS Primary Care Act which introduced PMS contracts brought with them much change. The changes paved the way for doctors to have more flexible career paths in general practice.

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You may be clear about which direction you wish your career to take.

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However, many GPs find it hard to decide the right career path.

#### You may be

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A GP at the end of your VTS

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A GP returning to the workforce

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A GP wishing to change their career path

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A GP approaching retirement

If you are looking for some help in deciding how to continue your general practice career then this guide may help you.

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# The First Step

Take time to think about how you wish to work as a GP.

Choosing a job is a bit like buying a house, you should be clear about what your requirements are.

You will need to balance what you want with what is available in the job market.

You might find it helpful to think about the following questions before embarking on finding the right job for you.

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1. Which geographic location do you want to work in?
2. How far are you prepared to travel to and from work?
3. Do you want to work full time or part time?
4. Are you looking for 1 job or several different posts to make up your hours?
5. Do you have other commitments that set boundaries to your working day, e.g. children, an existing job you wish to continue?
6. Do you want to be; A partner in a practice?

A salaried GP?

A locum?

1. Do you feel you would like to be part of a scheme that offers educational support?
2. How much money do you want and/or need to earn?
3. How important are the demographics of the practice you will be working at?
4. What is your ideal practice team?
5. Do you know what gives you job satisfaction?

*Most individuals find that if they work in a job that has meaning, is suitably challenging and they feel valued then they will experience high levels of job satisfaction.*

1. Are you looking for a long term or short-term post?
2. Do you know where you want to be in five years?

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# The Second Step

The following pages will help you think about the choices open to you.

This is **not** intended to be comprehensive guidance, but aims to cover in brief some of the main aspects to be considered.

Where you see a NA02125_ you will be given guidance on where to find out more from other sources.

Your options

* A GP Partner
* A salaried GP
* An associate or assistant GP
* The Retainer Scheme
* A Career Start Scheme
* A GP Locum
* Working abroad
* Returning to work

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# A GP Partner

* As a partner you will be running your own small business. As well as clinical responsibility for your patients you will be responsible for the premises you work from, your staff and the day-to-day running of your surgery.
* GP Partners may work in a single-handed practice or as part of a partnership.

*‘A partnership is the relation which subsists between persons carrying on a business in common with a view of profit’*

##### 1890 Partnership act

* Partners practice under a PMS contract or nGMS contract. Both contracts have brought many changes to the way GPs are able to earn money and structure their working day.
* It is essential that any practice you plan to join has a written partnership agreement and allow you access to the accounts.
* Most practices will ask you to work a period of mutual assessment (usually 6 months) before you formally decide to join the partnership.
* Many practices still ask GPs to work ‘to parity’. This means that for a period of time you will earn a percentage of your final salary, this is supposed to be in recognition of a settling in period.
* The term 'salaried partner' is a misnomer that leads to misunderstanding. Posts advertised as such should be treated with caution and the exact status of the post fully explored.

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The RCGP website has several downloadable information leaflets on many aspects of working as a GP partner

The BMA have several booklets on aspects of working as a GP partner which are available to members.

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# A Salaried Post

* A salaried GP is employed by a practice, Local Area Performance Team/PCT, or private provider.
* This role allows a GP to avoid the employment responsibilities of a GP partner.
* You can be employed for any number of hours. Full time is classified as 37.5 hours/week.
* The BMA are not allowed to recommend pay rates. Salaries vary dramatically across the country depending on availability of GPs and experience.
* The GPC have negotiated a salaried GP contract which was published with the nGMS contract. The contract (or one no less advantageous) should be used by all employers of salaried GPs.

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The BMA website has an excellent section on issues to consider when looking at a salaried post.

If you are a member of the BMA you can seek advice from them regarding contractual issues.

The National Association of Sessional GPs website is a very useful source of information and support [www.nasgp.org.uk](http://www.nasgp.org.uk) You need to pay a membership fee to access this site.



# An Associate or Assistant GP

* The associate scheme enables single handed, isolated GPs to employ a doctor. They are often employed by two practices.
* Assistants can be employed as a salaried GP by any practice. Some practices in certain areas may get funding for these posts. (An assistant allowance)

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The BMA website is a source of more information on this form of employment.

The National Association of Sessional GPs website also has a section on Assistant GPs. [www.nasgp.org.uk](http://www.nasgp.org.uk)

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# Schemes with Educational Support

The schemes described below all have educational support and paid protected time for CPD.

In each scheme the GP is employed as a salaried GP for which there is a contract of employment.

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# Retainer Scheme

* Started in the 1960s. The scheme is organised by the GP School for any GP who has a need to work part time, e.g. have children, sick relative, or recovering from illness themselves.
* Any GP who is eligible can apply.
* A retainee can work a maximum of 4-sessions in an approved practice. They can also work an additional 2 sessions in any other non-GP employment.
* The scheme is time limited usually for five years.
* Retainees are paid by the practice as a salaried GP and the practice receives a sessional grant for supporting the GP on the scheme.
* A nominated GP at the practice provides support.
* The GP School organise educational study days and small learning groups.

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The GP School has an information guide to this scheme which is available on the website <http://www.yorksandhumberdeanery.nhs.uk/general_practice/retainer__returner/gp_retainers/>

The scheme is organised for the Yorkshire and Humber GP School by Dr Nicola Gill njgill@doctors.org.uk

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# Career Start / Retention and Recruitment Scheme

* Bradford PCT launched a supported salaried GP scheme in 2000 to improve recruitment and retention in the area.
* GPs work is divided between clinical care, peer support and continuing development.
* The aim of the scheme is to enable GPs to gain experience working in an inner city practices with the hope that they may continue their career long term in the practice .
* GPs can work on the scheme full or part time.

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At the time of this going to print I have been unable to establish whether the scheme is still recruiting. I would suggest that any GP interested in the scheme make contact with Dr Peter Dickson at Bradford PCT PDickson@bradfordha.nhs.uk

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# Locum

* Many GPs choose to spend time working ’freelance'. This may involve working short term in many different practices, or longer term e.g. as a maternity locum in one practice.
* This is an excellent way of getting to know a new area. Many GPs choose to work long term in this way.

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The EXIT course booklet available from Dr Ramesh Mehay includes an excellent guide to the practicalities of being a locum.

The National Association of Sessional GPs website. [www.nasgp.org.uk](http://www.nasgp.org.uk) is also very help.



# Working Abroad

NA02125_The BMA has a series of useful articles on working abroad.

Including articles on Emigration

Taking time out to work or volunteer overseas

Opportunities for doctors within the EEA

Overseas contracts

You don’t have to be a member to access this information.

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# Returning to Work

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Guidance for GPs who have had a career break from general practice can be found on the GP School website using the following link

<http://www.yorksandhumberdeanery.nhs.uk/general_practice/retainer__returner/induction__refresher/>

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* All the career options describe above can be full time or part time.
* GP work is often described in term of sessions.

For an employed GP full time is 37.5 hours/week or 9 sessions.

This equates to a session being 4 hours and 10 minutes work.

As a partner a session is usually defined as half a day and the number of hours will vary between practices.

Full time varies with geography; full time is usually equivalent to either eight or nine ½ days weekly.

* You can also choose to job share, the BMA has a useful leaflet describing how this can work in practice.
* GPs can also use their skills in other ways e.g. Clinical assistants, GPwSI, teaching, medical journalism, to mention just a few.
* The term portfolio career refers to GPs who have chosen to try their hand at different career paths and are now working in several posts, one or all of them in general practice.

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# Step Three

How do I decide what is right for me?

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* Spend time deciding what it is you are looking for.
* Your ideal job may not exist but there is nothing wrong with knowing what you are looking for and what is likely to give you job satisfaction.
* Jobs are advertised in the BMJ, GP magazines, PCT, local postgraduate office. You can approach local practices directly.
* BMA series Career Focus has produced many useful articles.
* Work a few sessions in a practice as a locum before deciding whether it is the right place for you.
* Make time to regularly review the direction your career is going in.

# Final Thoughts

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*General practitioners are the first port of call for patients seeking the help of a NHS medical professional. As the lead clinicians in primary care, where some ninety percent of healthcare episodes take place, they provide a wide range of personal medical care and refer patients to specialist services when they need them.*

This factual definition of general practice does not convey the true nature of the varied, challenging, and demanding work involved in being a GP.

General practice in the 21st Century offers individual doctors a varied experience and career path.

The aim for you is to find the path that meets **your** needs and helps you make the most of **your** individual skills as a GP.

It is unfortunate that stress features highly in a GPs working life.

Studies have shown that having job satisfaction protects against suffering from stress.

Try to find a job where you are able to have job satisfaction.

You need to feel valued in your work and be in a job that is challenging and has meaning to experience job satisfaction.

This guide was written by Dr Nicola Gill GP Tutor for Career Development, it is based on her experiences working as a salaried GP, clinical assistant, locum, retainee GP and now part-time partner in York. Feedback and additional items for inclusion in this guide would be gratefully received. Thank you.

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