

Cardiac physiology

Join the team and make a difference

Cardiac physiologists carry out crucial diagnostic and analytical procedures for patients – ranging from babies to the elderly – with known or suspected heart disease.

What will you do?

As a cardiac physiologist, you will have plenty of patient contact, working as part of a large team providing care to heart patients.

Cardiac physiologists assess patients with vital diagnostic equipment during what is often a distressing time in their lives. The information you will gather is used by cardiologists when they make a diagnosis.

Although you are likely to be based in a hospital cardiology department, your job will vary depending on the types of procedures carried out by the hospital. You may monitor heart function during surgery and intensive care, and carry out procedures, including echocardiography or pacemaker implantation and follow up. Echocardiography obtains



moving pictures of the heart to help the cardiologist diagnose any disease in the heart valves and/or muscle. Pacemaker implantation and follow-up involves taking measurements to ensure that a pacemaker is functioning correctly when a patient is in theatre. After this, you treat patients in follow-up clinics to make sure that the pacemaker is functioning well and the battery life is satisfactory.

Where will you work?

Most cardiac physiologists are based in hospital cardiology departments – with both in- and outpatients. Others work in GP practices, operating theatres or critical care units.

What skills and qualities will you need?

- a calm, confident approach, so that you can deal with sometimes unwilling or incapacitated patients
- the ability to analyse and record results accurately
- willingness to deal with patients of all ages – sometimes you will see babies as well as older people
- an interest in physiology and anatomy
- good teamworking ability
- IT skills and ease working with high-tech equipment
- ability to stay focused in traumatic or pressurised situations

What entry routes are available?

To qualify as a cardiac physiologist you require a vocational BSc honours degree in clinical physiology. The course comprises several generic modules, normally over four years, and practical elements, which allow you to specialise in cardiology. On completion of your training you will be eligible to join the voluntary register of the Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists.

With GCSEs or an equivalent NVQ and/or previous work experience it is often possible to start work as a trainee or assistant. In this case, as a cardiographer, you will help doctors make vital decisions about a patient's condition and treatment as well as operate the electrocardiograph (ECG) machines that monitor the functioning of the heart. You'll combine on-the-job training with study so that you learn as you earn. For more information, see the *Clinical support worker* factsheet.

Some employers also offer cadet schemes, which involve a two-year training programme that gives you experience of different jobs within healthcare science.

For more information on the range of opportunities available in healthcare science, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications. This gives more specific details about what qualifications are necessary for each role. You can search for current vacancies and download job descriptions at www.jobs.nhs.uk

How can you develop your career?

This is a career with excellent prospects, and includes openings for research, management and education. Cardiac physiologists are expected to continually expand their knowledge as advances are made and some may carry out related specialised work.

With training, responsibility and experience, you could reach the highest level in the profession, attaining consultant status, at which level you are likely to be in charge of a large department or making a significant contribution to your area of expertise.

Find out more about what training is open to you and how you can develop your career, at www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/training

As well as moving to more senior and specialised roles within this area, you will also have the chance to take on additional responsibilities and progress within the organisation as part of the Career Framework. For more information about this initiative, please see the *Careers in healthcare science* booklet.

Pay

The national pay system in the NHS is called Agenda for Change (AfC). This applies to all staff except doctors, dentists and very senior managers. These are examples of roles and the AfC bands at which they may be paid: healthcare science support worker (Band 2); healthcare science assistant (Band 4); healthcare science practitioner (Band 5); healthcare science specialist (Band 6); healthcare science advanced (Band 7); healthcare science consultant (Band 8a-c). For more information, visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits

To find out more about this area of healthcare science, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working

For more information on the professional bodies relevant to healthcare science, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts