

Gastrointestinal physiology

Join the team and
make a difference

Gastrointestinal (GI) physiologists investigate problems in the function of the digestive system. They carry out specialised procedures that measure and assess the GI system, helping with disease diagnosis and therapy. Some procedures involve assessing urinary tract function, known as urodynamics.

What will you do?

As a GI physiologist, you will provide an essential service for a gastroenterology department. You will assess patients, often using minimally invasive techniques (classed as minor surgical procedures) and you will help to devise treatment plans, which may include therapy, surgery or medical intervention.

The tests you carry out will focus on determining the health of any part of a patient's digestive tract, including the liver, bile tract and pancreas.

In your role, you will be responsible for all technical, mechanical and electronic investigations on patients suffering from conditions such as severe reflux disease, microbial disorders, constipation, faecal incontinence and pelvic floor dysfunction. Measurements are taken under various conditions such as after food or medication.

Some of your work may involve urodynamics, which is the investigation of urinary difficulties, using specialist equipment.

The role requires you to empathise with patients and explain procedures to put

them at ease during what can be uncomfortable investigations.

What entry routes are available?

To qualify as a gastrointestinal physiologist, you need to undertake a vocational BSc (Hons) in clinical physiology, which includes an on-the-job element. The course allows you to specialise in an area of your choice (such as gastrointestinal physiology, cardiology or respiratory physiology). On completion of your training, you will be eligible to join the voluntary register of the Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists.

If you have a first-class or upper second-class degree in a relevant subject, you may be eligible to join the NHS Clinical Scientists Training Scheme. This is a four-year programme of in-depth training in a specialist area, usually leading to an MSc or specialist postgraduate diploma and registration with the Health Professions Council. For more information, visit www.nhsclinicalscientists.info

With GCSEs or an equivalent NVQ and/or previous work experience, it is often possible to start work as a trainee or assistant in healthcare science, combining on-the-job training with study so that you learn as you earn. For more information, see the *Clinical support worker* factsheet.

Some NHS organisations also offer apprenticeships, which involve a two-year training programme that can give you experience of different jobs within healthcare science.

Where will you work?	What skills and qualities will you need?
Many GI physiologists are based in gastroenterology or colorectal departments and work with both in and out patients.	• an interest in physiology and anatomy
	• an interest in research
	• a mature, sympathetic, confident approach to put the patient at ease
	• willingness to directly manage patients who have implanted devices in their GI tract
	• excellent verbal and written communication skills
	• ability to analyse and record results accurately

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. Gastrointestinal physiologists are expected to continually expand their knowledge as advances are made. With training, responsibility and experience, you could reach the highest level in the profession, attaining consultant status.

Find out more about what training is open to you, and how you can develop your career, at www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/training. 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 healthcare science staff except the most 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 careers in this area of healthcare science, please go to www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working

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