

VOX POPS

My ultimate career goal is to be Dean - and by that I mean David Dean, the illustrious president of St. Georges Hospital Medical School.

Male, 2nd Year, Georges.

My career is not the only thing that's important to me.

Female, 2nd Year, BL.

Working hours and uncertainty regarding placements makes it difficult for women to have children and pursue career goals. If there were greater flexibility then I would probably be a neurosurgeon.

Female, 4th Year, BL.

Being able to be a mother and have a family life are what have most coloured my careers choices. I don't want to work all hours of the day and night- there are more important things in life

Female, 3rd Year, GKT

I really don't think there are any specialties these days that have a specific gender match. I've seen many excellent consultants of both genders.

Male, 4th Year, BL

I think men lose out because of the assumption that women will take career breaks and so it's easier for them to do so.

Male, 4th Year, BL

I have added General Practice to my list, merely because it has flexible hours, since I want to have a family.

Female, 4th Year, BL.

Flexible training for all trainees is imperative and it is vital that the NHS, royal colleges, whoever, work to ensure that this is a reality for doctors now and in the future

Female, 3rd Year, GKT.

All I want is happiness and enough money to live

Female, 5th Year, BL.

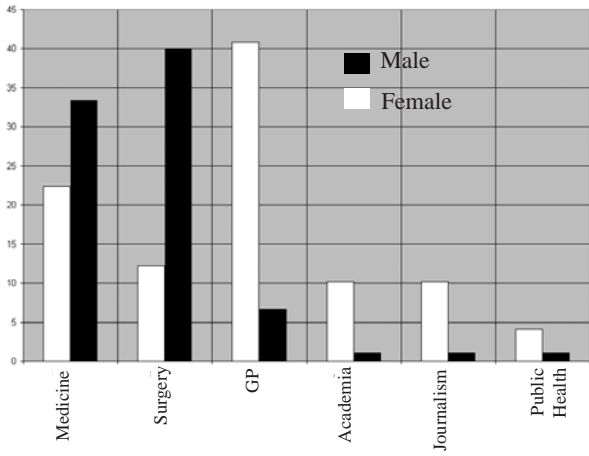
I don't consider any of the positions particularly 'female!'

Female, 3rd Year GKT.

Only being in the 2nd year inevitably means that my contact with specific specialties is limited so judgements made about them are likely to be inaccurate and largely based on ER!

Female, 2nd Year, GKT/i

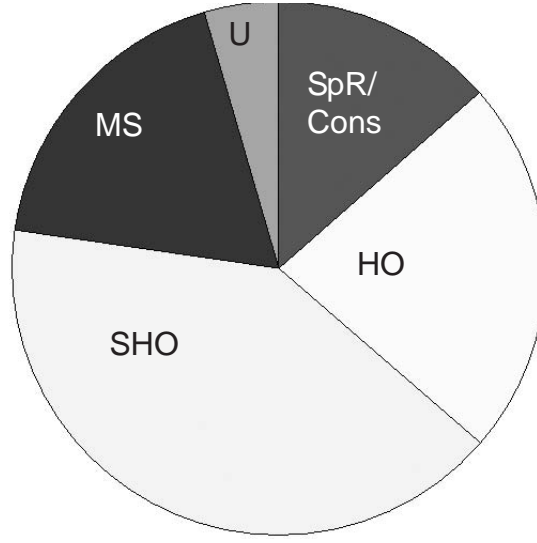
A selection of the results of our exclusive survey:



What speciality area do you see your self going into?

The numbers:

- Less than 1% of men had been discouraged from following a career-pathway due to their gender, compared to 45% of women.
- 46% of respondents believed trauma and orthopaedic surgery was a career with a strong male bias, while 31% believed cardiothoracic surgery was also overly male dominated.
- 24% felt all careers in surgery were for men.
- Not one female was confident that they could work flexibly without hindering their career.
- 13% of men thought having children would hinder their career, while 91% of women thought it would.



At what stage in your career would you consider getting married?

- Females only.
- MS = Medical School
- HO = House officer
- SHO = Senior house officer
- SpR/Consultant = Specialist registrar level or later.
- U = unlikely to get married

Kumar gets clerked

PROFESSOR Parveen Kumar is the academic vice president of the Royal College of Physicians and a gastroenterologist at St Bartholomew's, The Royal London and Homerton hospitals. A patriot for the NHS, she has worked for over 30 years in North and East London and continues to be involved in a number of advisory groups and boards. In 2002 she was the Non-Executive Director at NICE and left to take up the Chair of the Medicine's Commission UK. Her printed name in any medical text is followed by an impressive array of abbreviated qualifications and from 2001 she was able to add CBE to the end of them due to her services to medicine.

Professor Kumar's contribution to medical education is familiar to many a medical student as copies of the bestselling 'Clinical Medicine', or 'Kumar and Clark' as it is better known, can be found in undergraduate bedrooms and medical libraries everywhere from the UK to Hong Kong. The first edition in 1987 introduced a fresh and innovative approach to medical publishing that redefined the standard of medical textbooks. Unsatisfied with the tired and turgid texts that they had to endure as medical students, Professor Kumar and colleague Dr Michael Clark sought to produce the definitive medical textbook as they meticulously wrote and re-wrote every para-

graph of every page that they would receive.

This month, Professor Kumar joins the debate on gender distribution in the NHS and tells *Medical Student* about her experiences of being a physician, academic and mother.

Were there many female medical students about when you were training?

When I was in the first year there were 10 girls out of 120 odd boys. Once I qualified I was the only girl for utterly years. I got used to being the only girl and for most of the time it didn't matter. It would get to me though when a male registrar could take time off to play golf without being questioned but should I want to take my children out or attend their nativity play someone would point out 'Oh she would want time off because she's a girl!' This upset me a little.

Did this ever make you think you had you try harder?

Yes and I would grit my teeth and say 'Right I am going to be better than these boys!' I suppose in a way that is what really propelled me. First of all I was Asian, and there were no other Asian or foreign persons on the team, and I was female. I was also very shy. I still am. (she laughs) In all honesty I have been very lucky. It was irritating when male colleagues implied that I couldn't reach consultancy level but it didn't

discourage me in any way.

When you were studying did you have any role models or mentors that you looked up to?

We had a very young, intelligent and active consultant named Sir Antony Dawson (the student halls in Whitechapel, Dawson Hall are named after him). I met him towards the end of my course and knew that I wanted to work for him and eventually did. Dr Clark was his 'number one' so really Dawson and Clark brought me up.

How did marrying and starting a family fit in with your career? Were there any difficulties?

Even in those days when there were women about it was a legitimate question to ask in an interview 'Are you planning to have a baby while you are here?' It would be totally un-PC now. There was never a right time to have children due to the pace of a medical career. I had both my children while I was a registrar. My husband was also a practicing doctor but was very supportive. I was teaching, I was working and I had a family to look after. We were very much 'boxing and coxing'.

Since 1991 female medical students have outnumbered the male medical students yet if you look at those in consultancy positions the majority



Prof. Kumar & Dr Clark receiving another award.

of them are still men. Why do you think this is the case?

It will take time for changes to be seen. The other thing is that women often temporarily take time off to have babies and return later. During these periods their careers are unable to progress. We have to be supportive and provide the right sort of jobs for women so that they do come back to work. There has got to be flexibility, and almost as many men are now asking for flexibility in their working hours.

Within academic medicine things are slowly changing. Carol (Black, president of the Royal College of Physicians) is a female, the second vice president is female, and my successor as academic vice president will be a female. And that remember is by open competition.

The proportion of women moving into general practice seems to be more than men. Why do you think there are fewer women in hospital based medicine?

General practice is much easier to organise your time around. You can have surgeries when it best suits you. Hospitals are more challenging as you have to be there all the time. You have ward rounds almost every day and also go on take. Now days a lot more medical students are going into general practice and GPs are doing a remarkable job. Primary care and hospital doctors are both pressurised but in different ways.

We can't interview you without mentioning the book! When is the next edition out?

We are working on the sixth edition now, which is the reason why you can see me looking so tired and shattered. We are trying to release it during the next academic year. The work involved for every edition is the same. You collect all the references put them together and then find you have to re-write things when new references come in. Don't ever write a text book!