

# Preferences and factors affecting medical career choices in final year Hong Kong medical students

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## Abstract

### Introduction

It is important to gather information about medical career preferences to facilitate planning, resource allocation, and workforce distribution. Intellectual satisfaction, perceived aptitude and skills, and work life balance are several factors that have been identified to influence medical career choices in the United Kingdom. However, there is a paucity of data looking into this in Hong Kong. This study is aimed to evaluate medical career preferences and factors affecting medical career choices in medical students during their final year at The University of Hong Kong.

### Methods

Ethics approval was obtained with the Hong Kong University Institutional Review Board (IRB). A cross sectional questionnaire survey was conducted for 5<sup>th</sup> year medical students attending a pre-internship lecture in May 2015. After obtaining informed consent, medical students were asked to answer qualitative questions on career preferences and factors that would affect medical career choices.

### Results

Overall, 62.7% (74/118) students completed the questionnaires. Eighty-nine point two percent (89.2%) of students planned to undertake specialty training. Most students (46%) preferred Kowloon for internship training, followed by Hong Kong Island (37%). Hong Kong Island was the most preferred area for specialty training (44%), followed next by Kowloon (36%). Surgical specialties (including orthopaedics) and medicine were the two most popular medical specialties. When combining their 1<sup>st</sup> three choices, medicine was selected by the most students (48.7%), followed by surgical specialties (41.7%) and anaesthesiology/intensive care medicine (34.9%). Regarding factors affecting medical career choices, the most students (50%) thought perceived aptitude and skills was extremely important, which was followed next by intellectual satisfaction (39.2%).

### Conclusion

Medicine and surgical specialties are the most popular medical specialties according to this survey. The vast majority of students planned to remain in the public medical sector immediately after graduation and pursue specialist training in the Hospital Authority, which is important for maintaining a high quality healthcare system. Perceived aptitude and skills are the most important factors affecting medical career choices, and this finding is similar to that found in the United Kingdom.

Figure 1: Career choice of students immediately after completing internship

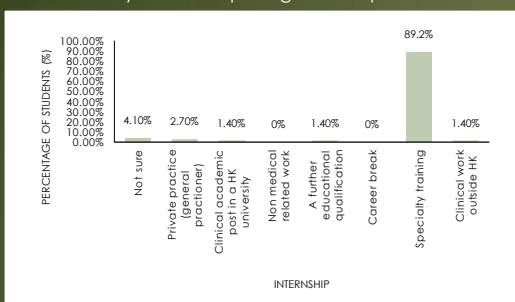


Figure 2: Student preference for location of internship

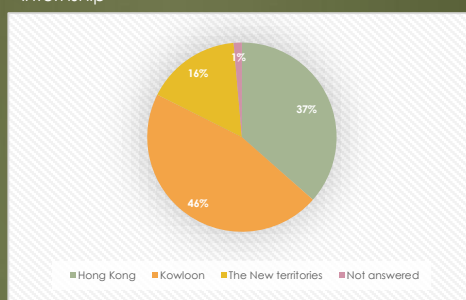


Figure 3: Student preference for location for specialty training

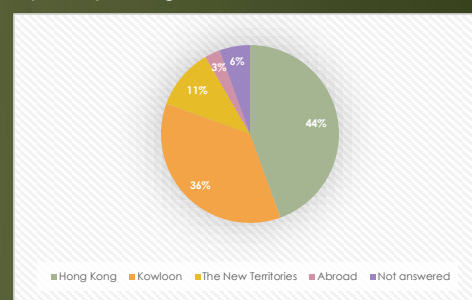


Table 1: Popularity of medical specialties amongst final year medical students

Specialty	Percentage of student (%)			
	First 3 choices combined	First choices	Second choice	Third choice
Medical/ medical specialties (eg cardiology, gastroenterology, respiratory medicine)	48.70%	27.00%	12.20%	9.50%
Surgical/ surgical specialties (eg orthopaedics, ENT, ophthalmology)	41.90%	32.40%	6.80%	2.70%
Anaesthesia/ intensive care medicine	34.90%	5.40%	16.00%	13.50%
Emergency medicine (A&E)	31.20%	6.80%	9.50%	14.90%
Not answered	31.20%	9.50%	9.50%	12.20%
Family medicine	27.10%	1.40%	13.50%	12.20%
Paediatric medicine	27.00%	2.70%	13.50%	10.80%
Obstetrics and gynaecology	19.00%	4.10%	8.10%	6.80%
Psychiatric specialties	19.00%	6.80%	5.40%	6.80%
Radiology	16.20%	4.10%	4.10%	8.00%
Laboratory specialties	2.80%	0.00%	1.40%	1.40%
Occupational health	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Public health	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Table 2: Perceived importance of factors influencing medical career choices

	Extremely important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important	Not answered
Intellectual satisfaction	39.2%	52.7%	8.1%	0%	0%
Own aptitude/ skills	50%	46.0%	4.1%	0%	0%
Potential earnings	4.1%	37.8%	33.8%	9.5%	1.4%
Potential for future private practice	4.1%	41.9%	33.8%	18.9%	1.4%
Work/life balance	37.8%	43.2%	18.9%	0%	0%
Career prospects	23.0%	64.9%	10.8%	0%	1.4%
Amount of patient contact	20.3%	58.1%	17.6%	2.7%	1.4%
Continuity of patient contact	17.6%	39.2%	31.1%	10.8%	1.4%
Geographic location	2.7%	52.7%	36.5%	8.1%	0%
Transportation links	2.7%	54.1%	32.4%	9.5%	1.4%
Spouses/ partner's career	2.7%	23.0%	28.4%	28.4%	17.6%
Other	0%	6.8%	2.7%	20.3%	70.3%

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