

Getting into Palliative Medicine

*A guide from the Association for Palliative
Medicine*



THE ASSOCIATION FOR PALLIATIVE MEDICINE
Of Great Britain and Ireland

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2024 version

How do I apply?

Applications for Round One recruitment usually take place in early February. It is worth looking at the timeline, eligibility criteria, person specification and application scoring information well ahead of time as there are lots of opportunities to improve your application score in the months leading up to the deadline. The application form takes a long time to complete so avoid leaving it until the last minute.

Provisional post numbers for each region are advertised online but can often change. You will be given a pre-interview score to determine whether an interview is offered. Your pre-interview score will be combined with your interview score (although the points will then score differently) and you will be ranked against all other candidates. Region preferences are generally asked for around the time of the interview.

Note that with the change of palliative medicine to dual training (with general medicine) all applicants will have to complete Internal Medicine Training (IMT) or equivalent.

The main website to look at is: <https://phstrecruitment.org.uk/specialties/palliative-medicine>

Here you can find a detailed breakdown on the self-assessment requirements, the scoring matrix for interviews and the person-specific specification for the specialty.

It will also show you the key dates for each stage of the application process.

What does the initial application require?

The first element of your application is completing the application form which includes the self-assessment process.

The initial part of the application form consists of personal information such as your details, references and employment history.

The bulk of the application form is the self-assessment segment.

What is the self-assessment segment?

The self-assessment segment is part of your written application and asks you to grade yourself in a region of domains and complete short text answers (typically 75-100 words) on what skills you have in these areas. You will also need to provide evidence to back up your claims.

These domains include commitment to specialty, postgraduate degrees, additional achievements, MRCP, presentations, publications, teaching, QI and leadership.

Each domain has a different amount of points allocated; some are worth more points than others!

Later in the application cycle you will be asked to upload evidence of your achievements to verify your achievements. Achievements must be completed before the submission; you will not be allocated points for achievements that are “in progress”.

There are also further marks for ensuring that your evidence is clearly organised and easy to navigate.

The Physician Higher Specialty Training Recruitment website gives further information and a detailed breakdown of the scoring matrix here:

<https://www.phstrecruitment.org.uk/recruitment-process/applying/application-scoring>

What is the interview like?

The interviews take place over a couple of days, often in February or March. If you are invited to interview, you will be able to select a preference for date and time. At present, the lead recruiter for palliative medicine is the West Midlands Deanery.

The interview takes place as an online video interview. If you have been selected for interview then several days before your interview you will be able to test the video-conferencing program.

Although any interview is nerve-wracking, everyone there will be supportive and want you to do as well as you can. The interviewers are looking for people who will be good future colleagues in Palliative Medicine. Each station will have two interviewers who will mark. You can find their marking criteria on the PHST Recruitment website.

There are two 15 minute interview stations. Each station will have two questions, each expected to last 5-8 minutes typically. Therefore in total there are four main headings, one per question. As the interview takes place online the time cut-offs for each station are automatically enforced.

What are the stations?

Station 1:

- Suitability and commitment to specialty
- Medical registrar suitability

Station 2:

- Ethical / communications scenario (with reflection)
- Professionalism and governance

Station 1 (15 mins)

Question 1:

This question is where the main areas being assessed will be your **suitability for and commitment** to training in the specialty, and your achievements and engagement with training and learning to date. This is your opportunity to talk about your passion for Palliative Medicine and sell yourself as a future trainee.

Make sure you've prepared for some commonly asked questions, and know your evidence folder well so that you can draw the interviewers' attention to your key achievements.

This station will be approximately seven minutes.

Question 2:

This question relates to **medical registrar suitability**. This looks at the non-clinical aspects of being a medical registrar as well as clinical capabilities such as managing an acute unselected take or managing a multi-disciplinary team including effective discharge planning.

These are skills you will have developed through IMT with these clinical capabilities taken specifically from the IMT curriculum. This is also a great station to present examples that demonstrate other non-clinical skills e.g. situational awareness.

This station will be approximately eight minutes.

Station 2: (15 mins)

Question 3:

This station will present you with an **ethical scenario** and is also designed to assess your communication skills. Again, this is likely to have a Palliative Medicine theme but won't demand specific knowledge. The emphasis here is on how you communicate.

The station will have an actor and you will also will receive a short briefing with the main aims of the scenario before the question giving you a chance to prepare.

This question also has time allocated for you to reflect on how the scenario went. It is a good opportunity for you to describe positives and negatives from your scenario as well as signpost to things you may wish to do if time was not an issue (which unfortunately it will be in the station!).

The role play will last eight minutes, and the reflection will last for two minutes. Remember there are marks for both the scenario and the reflection! These times do not include the five minute preparation time you will have to read your briefing.

Question 4:

The final question will focus on **professionalism and clinical governance**. It is worth thinking about your local governance structures, as well as how things like audit and quality improvement link into governance .

A useful document to look at would be the GMC's **Good Medical Practice**, particularly for the professionalism component. This is a good station to consider how you work with your colleagues and how you have managed difficult interactions with your colleagues / patients in the past. GMP was most recently updated in January 2024.

This question typically lasts around five minutes.

Top tips for success from current SpRs Hannah Rose, Isobel Jackson & Vanessa Jackson

- **Prepare early** - Spend time considering how you can maximise your pre-interview score - small additional things can make a big difference. **Check the ST4 Person-Specification information** available through the RCP application website: <https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/person-specifications/person-specifications-2024/palliative-medicine-st4-2024> . Measure yourself and your CV against the 'Essential' and 'Desirable' criteria and try to fill any gaps that you can. Pay particular attention to areas that score highly.
- **Gain experience** – The interview provides an opportunity to demonstrate your experience in Palliative Medicine. It is beneficial (although not essential) to get experience working as part of a Specialist Palliative Care Team. Not only will this demonstrate commitment to the specialty and better prepare you for the ethical scenarios, it will also give you the chance to see if a career in Palliative Medicine is right for you. There are often non-training jobs in Palliative Medicine as well as opportunities for taster weeks.
- **Look out for courses and conferences in Palliative Medicine** - the APM website often advertises these. These provide opportunities to stay in touch with topical issues as well as potential careers advice. Talk to your local Palliative Care team – they are likely to be able to

provide advice about the interview and may have projects that you can get involved with.

- **Practice makes perfect!** Find a friend or a colleague and get them to ask you questions. A Specialty Interview Book is a good investment and provides sample questions. There is very little time at each station so having a structure in your head beforehand will help you to give effective and confident answers.
- **Spend time preparing your self assessment application form.** It is crucial that this documents all of your achievements declared on your application form (and any that you achieve between submitting your application and the interview). The easier it is for the interviewers to navigate the better. Make sure that you carefully follow the guidelines for the layout.
- Remember - no one expects you to be a Palliative Medicine doctor already! They just want to see that you're passionate about working in this area in the future and that you have spent time thinking about why it is what you want to do.
- **Look out for other ways to demonstrate your interest:** audits, essay prizes or The Association of Palliative Medicine Juniors Committee (see <https://apmonline.org/committee-pages/juniors-committee/>). This is always a good place to find out about current opportunities. Why not consider applying for a post on the committee or attending the annual conference?
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Do I have the right experience?

- With the change to dual-training all applicants must show they have enrolled in Internal Medicine Training or equivalent.
- Many applicants will not have had direct experience in palliative care, but many of the questions will focus on experience that you **do** have e.g. dealing with the medical take.
- Don't forget that there are often transferrable skills from other specialties such as oncology, haematology or care of the elderly. The person specific specification can give you more guidance on this!

Note the application deadlines and do not give up! There is a second round of recruitment later in the year so look out for timelines for this too.

If you are unsuccessful after both rounds of recruitment, seek advice from your deanery's Training Programme Director for Palliative Medicine, the details for which

should be available on your deanery website. If your heart is set on the specialty, consider a non-training grade hospice post, which gives you valuable clinical experience in the specialty as well as demonstrating your commitment.

We wish you the best of luck in your application!