

ME/CFS: To which area of medicine does it belong, and who should teach it?

ME/CFS is a multisystem illness; research has shown that people with ME/CFS have abnormalities in their nervous, immune, and cardiovascular systems, and at the cellular level there are disturbances to the biochemical pathways which produce ATP.¹ Moreover, ME/CFS can be viewed as a post-acute infection syndrome;² it has historically occurred in outbreaks, and up to 75% of ME/CFS patients report an infectious onset.³ Its etiology is unknown.

All this suggests that ME/CFS could reasonably belong to any number of medical specialties or subject areas including cardiology, immunology, and infectious diseases. However ME/CFS tends to be viewed as an ‘orphan’ disease which has not been claimed by any medical specialty.

In practice, GPs are responsible for diagnosing and managing ME/CFS. Specialist ME/CFS services do exist in some parts of the UK, but (with a few exceptions) they are staffed by occupational therapists or nurses, not by doctors, and are unable to provide medical advice or treatment.

The GMC requires that training on ME/CFS be included in post-graduate programs on: Paediatrics Specialty Syllabus, Paediatric Rheumatology, Immunology Curriculum, Infectious Diseases curriculum, Tropical Medicine curriculum, Liaison Psychiatry, and Curriculum for Acute Internal Medicine.³

When it comes to undergraduate training, it seems that medical schools will have to decide for themselves which classes ME/CFS should be included in and who should teach it, perhaps in consultation with the Medical Schools’ Council.

References

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2. Choutka, J., Jansari, V., Hornig, M. *et al.* **Unexplained post-acute infection syndromes**. *Nat Med* 28, 911–923 (2022). doi:10.1038/s41591-022-01810-6. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-022-01810-6>
3. Rosie King, personal communication.