

# FLYING FOUNDATION DOCTORS:

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## Pre-hospital taster days

As a whole, anaesthesia is a specialty to which foundation doctors receive minimal exposure.<sup>1</sup> Even less exposure is found on medical school curriculums where the usual 'block' of anaesthesia and critical care is around 1 to 2 weeks. Awareness of the role of an anaesthetist within the hospital and elsewhere is therefore limited.

Pre-hospital emergency medicine (PHEM) is an expanding sub-speciality of anaesthesia. Medical students and junior doctors have even more limited exposure to the pre-hospital environment; PHEM very rarely features on medical school/foundation curricula. This makes it difficult for junior doctors to identify PHEM as a potential career as an anaesthetist and lack of clinical experience opportunities makes it difficult to access training pathways. The Royal College of Anaesthetists advises trainees interested in PHEM to start preparation early.<sup>2</sup>



Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire Air Ambulance (LNAA) responds to critically ill medical and trauma patients. The majority of receiving hospitals are based in the Trent Foundation School. LNAA receive multiple requests a month to allow foundation trainees for observer shifts; these requests can rarely be accommodated. Foundation doctors are usually given the opportunity to select 'taster days' in specialities of their choosing, allowing them to identify potential careers and demonstrate commitment. Given the air ambulances existence outside normal NHS operations, organising PHEM taster days is difficult. To address this experiential gap, LNAA developed a PHEM 'taster day'.



A flyer was sent to Trent foundation doctors via their foundation program directors. 52 foundation doctors expressed an interest in attending the taster day when it was first advertised, and more since. Places on the course were allocated on a first come first served basis. A pilot taster day took place in January 2023, and the taster days are now running a regular biannual basis. Three groups of 12-14 foundation doctors have completed the taster day to date, with a 4<sup>th</sup> group due to complete the day in July 2024.



The taster day provided an overview of pre-hospital working and skills and attributes required. Practical skills were taught in small groups, covering critical care interventions such as major haemorrhage control, patient packaging and airway management. The candidates then completed simulations- concentrating on areas of practice that can be very different in the pre-hospital environment. These included being the first responder to a medical cardiac arrest outside, a challenging patient extrication from a difficult environment (patient unconscious on the top tier of a bunk bed) and delivering a pre-hospital anaesthetic. The candidates were able to appreciate the difficulties of pre-hospital environments and develop their team working skills when working in inherently stressful situations with unwell patients. The participants were shown the full range of equipment carried by the LNAA team within both the helicopter and critical care cars. The day concluded with a careers talk, giving advice and answering questions on training pathways leading to careers in pre-hospital emergency medicine and adjacent areas (eg. event medicine.)

The candidates were asked to complete a pre taster day questionnaire grading the following on a scale of 1-10:

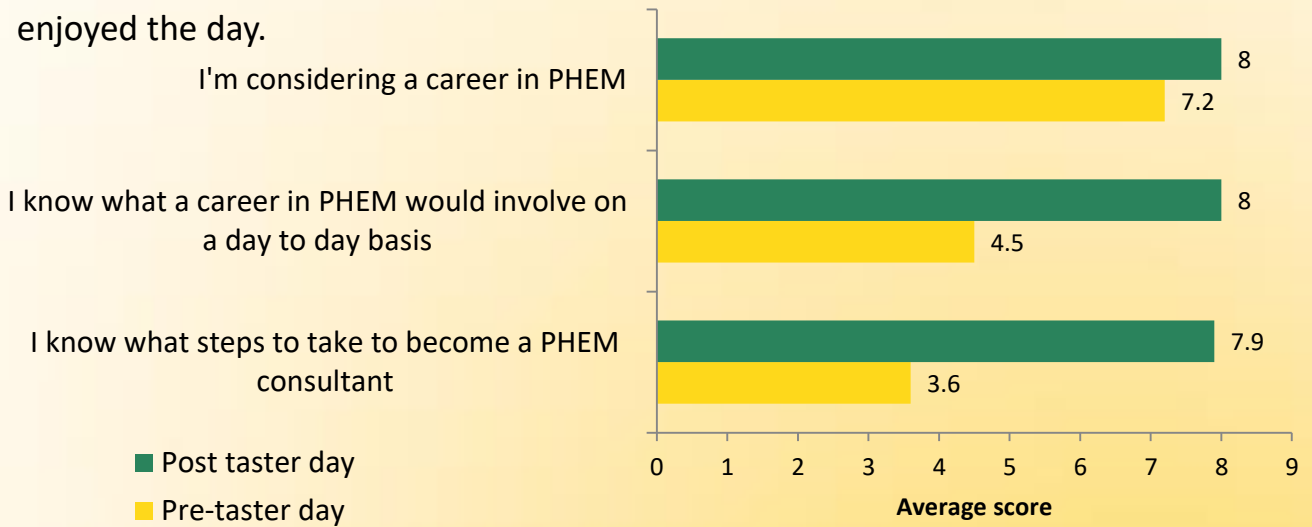
- I am considering a career involving PHEM
- I know what a career in PHEM involves on a day-to-day basis
- I know what steps to take to become a PHEM consultant



At the end of each day, the participants filled out a graded response to the same pre-event questions. 91% of candidates were more likely to consider a career in PHEM. 100% of candidates knew more about what a PHEM career entails and what steps to take to become a PHEM consultant. Feedback was overall positive and all the candidates enjoyed the day.

*Candidate feedback: What was your favourite thing about the taster day?*

**BASE TOUR**  
**CAREERS TALK**  
**RSI SIMULATIONS**  
**SKILL STATIONS**  
**HELICOPTER**



PHEM is a growing sub-specialty of anaesthesia, but opportunities for gaining clinical experience at a junior level are limited. ‘Taster days’ can provide an enjoyable and informative way to plug this gap- allowing junior trainees to develop their insight into this career and expanding knowledge of PHEM and anaesthesia in general. Several junior anaesthetic trainees were also provided with the opportunity to help run simulations and teach airway skills; enabling them to achieve exposure to teaching and pre-hospital care. Increased understanding of PHEM will allow better working relationships with hospitals and community services in the future. The LNAA ‘taster days’ are continue to run for foundation doctors and have now expanded to include medical students, paramedic students and local ambulance crews.

<sup>1</sup> Yorkshire and Humber. How to prepare foundation doctors. <https://www.yorksandhumberdeanery.nhs.uk/anaesthesia/school-information/recruitment/how-prepare-foundation-doctors>

<sup>2</sup> J Turner, K White, J Birks. RCOA Pre-Hospital Emergency Medicine: A guide for trainees and trainers. October 2022.

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-03/RCoA%20PHEM%20Guide%20for%20Trainees%20and%20Trainers%20V1.0.pdf>

