



Obtaining the MFFLM in General Forensic Medicine by Dr Daniel Hurley

May 2020 Review date May 2023 – check www.fflm.ac.uk for latest update

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Preparation

The decision to undertake any postgraduate medical examination is not taken lightly. The Membership exam in General Forensic Medicine is no exception and in common with other Royal College examinations, obtaining them requires a considerable investment of time, effort and money.

However, the investment is worth it. If you are genuinely interested in this as an area of practice, as I am, you may well find yourself - dare I say it - enjoying the work that you will be putting in. Be under no illusion though, the exam is tough and in order to pass all parts of it, that work will need to be done.

Planning

Having decided to take the exams, the first important matter to consider is timing. In order to be eligible to sit part 2, one has to have been practicing in forensic medicine for at least 3 years. In addition, a 'pass' in the part 1 is valid only for 4 years. Further information on this is provided in the Regulations (available on the [FFLM website](http://www.fflm.ac.uk)).

Personally, I decided to hedge my bets and get 2 years' experience in forensic medicine before I sat the part 1. This would then have given me 3 attempts at the part 2 while my part 1 was still valid, should I have needed it.

The Part 1 Examination

This is a common examination to GFM, SOM and MLA with its focus on the legal and regulatory knowledge required for practice.

The syllabus for the Part 1 is comprehensive and very well defined. I used this as the starting point for my revision and it very much formed the basis for my study.

The FFLM has several resources available including a reading list as well holding a revision day. I found the revision day very helpful, well worth attending and would recommend it to anyone sitting the exam. Though it is held at least a month before the exam, in order to get the most out of the day, I would recommend starting your revision well in advance of the revision day.

The Part 2 Examinations

This comprises two separate examinations which are sat on consecutive days: a written paper and a clinical exam, namely the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).

Similarly to part 1, there is a suggested reading list and a syllabus available, but unlike SOM, there is no online e-learning course for GFM. There are, however, a number of good quality text books available. Which ones you decide to use will of course be a matter of personal preference, but I found the following particularly useful:

- Simpsons Forensic Medicine, 14th Edition
- Clinical Forensic Medicine: A Physicians Guide, 4th Edition
- Oxford Handbook of Forensic Medicine
- Knight's Forensic Pathology 4th Edition

The Encyclopaedia of Forensic and Legal Medicine is also useful as a reference text for greater detail on selected aspects of the syllabus.

Additionally, the full spectrum of general medicine is encountered in routine clinical forensic practice and this is - perhaps not surprisingly - reflected in the examination itself.

An important resource that shouldn't be overlooked is the collection of [FFLM publications](http://www.fflm.ac.uk). These cover a wide range of matters pertinent to clinical forensic medicine. These are up to date, useful for everyday practice (not just the exam) and are available online.

The written paper itself is challenging. The syllabus is broad, the exam is long and your answers handwritten (not multiple choice). Expect to be doing a lot of writing very quickly and for your hand to be aching afterwards!

The FFLM also run a revision day for the part 2 exams, which includes a simulated patient / mock OSCE. For practicing doctors, preparation for the OSCE takes place every time you see a patient. If in doubt as what to revise, recall that familiar tautology from medical school: common things are common.



Summary

No doubt if you are reading this you have given serious thought to Forensic Medicine as a career and don't need to be convinced of the challenging, varied and unique opportunities that it offers.

Presently, obtaining membership is not mandatory for forensic physicians, so everyone who presents themselves for the exam will have their own motivations for doing so. For me, an interest in the subject matter meant that I would have been doing the work anyway, so why not have something to show for your efforts?

Certainly, obtaining the MFFLM in GFM is a challenge, but would you want it any other way? I'd encourage any doctor working in forensic medicine considering doing the exams to do so. Just put the work in and the challenge can be met!

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