

Further information

<i>Volunteer activity</i>	Volunteer for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture
<i>What I do</i>	<p>The Medical Foundation has created a holistic approach to the care of the victims of torture that responds to their physical, emotional and practical needs. Treatment may take the form of an initial medical assessment, individual casework and counselling, group therapy, physical therapy or psychotherapy. When a client needs their injuries documented to support their claim for asylum, they are referred to the Medico-Legal Report team, and this is the team that I work for. You can work in this team if you have a legal background, but a legal training is not essential and lots of the volunteers who do this work are not lawyers. Anyone with an interest in human rights and some professional experience of dealing with trauma could apply to work for the team.</p> <p>Please note that there are many other kinds of volunteer work at the Medical Foundation. If this doesn't sound like your sort of thing, don't stop reading, just skip to the last two boxes! My job is to conduct pre-assessment interviews of clients who have been referred to the Medical Foundation by a solicitor or a refugee organisation because they want their client's injuries, and/or psychological trauma, to be documented in an expert Medico-Legal report for a court or tribunal. The interviews last about an hour and a half, using a standard Medical Foundation intake form. The aim is to collect as much information as possible about what has happened to the client and to make a note of any visible scars relating to their torture. The medical legal team then look at this information in order to decide whether or not to offer the client an appointment with a doctor. The point is that the MLR team are massively over-subscribed with requests for reports and they need to ensure that the right cases are prioritised. A report needs to have the potential to make a material difference to the outcome of the asylum claim for which it is requested. For example, if I meet someone and it becomes apparent during the interview that they do not have any significant scars and they appear psychologically healthy, it will be helpful for the medical legal team to know this when they are deciding which cases to allocate for an appointment with a doctor.</p>
<i>Time commitment</i>	<p>This is really up to you. I do one day a week at the moment, three interviews per day. Including reading time and writing up time this takes somewhere between 5/6 hours, depending on how punctual the clients are. You can do a weekday or a Saturday morning, and you can start early in the morning or later in the day if that suits your schedule. To begin with you probably wouldn't</p>

	want to do more than two interviews per session, so that might take 4/5 hours in total. You need to be clear that you can make the commitment in advance because once you give your dates to the admin staff they will book in appointments with the solicitors and it will cause real problems if you cancel at the last minute. You will need to do some training at the outset. This mainly consists of observing other interviews.
<i>Why I do it</i>	I find this work incredibly interesting and it has become an essential part of my working life. I have learnt a huge amount about the politics and culture of the many different countries that the clients come from. It has taught me about the extraordinary courage and resilience of ordinary people. Curiously, the Medical Foundation is a very joyous place to work; you can hear dozens of different languages being spoken all around the building and there is an almost palpable feeling of optimism. People come to the Medical Foundation when they have suffered unimaginable pain and they discover that there is someone who will listen to them and someone who can help them. It is a real privilege to work there.
<i>Downsides</i>	The work can be distressing. You will occasionally see very bad scars and you will regularly hear very disturbing accounts of torture and rape.
<i>Other work at Medical Foundation</i>	At the moment the Medical Foundation are looking for volunteers to help with their gardening projects, fundraising volunteers and clinical volunteers, including doctors, counsellors and health visitors. See website details below.
<i>What to do next</i>	Have a look at the website: www.torturecare.org.uk .