

Global careers

Besides the well known medical professions as physician, medical specialist or researcher, there are a lot more interesting career possibilities in (global) health care. With these short interviews we want to introduce different, interesting, sometimes unknown, professions to you. **MP**

Let's introduce



Henk Schallig PhD is coordinator of Parasitological research at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. He leads a research group currently comprising 15 people, who are working on parasitic diseases, mainly malaria, leishmaniasis and trypanosomiasis, both in the Netherlands and in developing countries.



Prof Louise Gunning PhD is chairman of the executive board of the Academic Medical Centre in Amsterdam and dean of the medical faculty of the University of Amsterdam.

How would you describe your career path?

Not well planned in advance. I started studying to become a teacher, but became more and more interested in doing research. After receiving my PhD at the biology faculty of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam on schistosomiasis, I worked at the Institute of Infectious Diseases and Immunology of Utrecht University. My main subject was vaccine development against gastro-intestinal parasites.

After a short time in the industrial world, I spent my golden handshake mainly in Thailand. Back in Holland I applied for a position at the Royal Tropical Institute, where I have been working now for almost 8 years... a long time. Maybe time for a change, again?

I studied medicine in Groningen, but after my first degree, I went to the US and did a Masters in International Health at the Johns Hopkins School of Public health. After that I made career in health policy and epidemiological research. I became Professor of Social Medicine at the AMC and went on to my current position.

What does your schedule for a week look like?

Henk Schallig No week is the same. Last week I was in Paramaribo for the kick off of our leishmaniasis research programme. Next week, I will have to catch up with a lot of paper work, discuss results obtained by my group at the lab, report some management issues and finalize the budget for the leishmaniasis project. Then I have to prepare for a trip to Burkina Faso to monitor the progress of one of our malaria projects on drug resistance.

Louise Gunning Every week the Board of Directors meets, we usually have two or three quarterly meetings with the divisions of the AMC, I talk to prospective professors, government representatives, students, foreign visitors, ... to be honest I spend most of my week talking to people who work or study at the AMC or with whom the AMC collaborates.

What would you like to achieve in your job?

We want to contribute to better health for people living in developing countries. In particular, by making tools available which allow local doctors to make the right diagnosis and give appropriate medicines.

I would like to help fulfil the ambitions of the AMC to be the leading academic medical centre in the Netherlands, with an excellent medical school, an international reputation in science and evidence based patient care with compassion.

What do you like most about your job?

Working with many different people under very different circumstances. In Mbita, a small village on the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya, we managed to see 1 200 patients and treated around 300 for malaria in only six weeks and with limited resources. That was very rewarding.

The diversity of the people I meet. But also doing lots of different things, including international activities. I never envisioned this position, but it is a very exciting job to perform.

What would you tell a student who wants to head in this direction?

Students may have the impression that it contains a lot of pleasant travelling to exotic places, but it is hard work, sometimes under difficult conditions and, unfortunately, often there is not enough funding. I advise students to get enough practical experience: work in a laboratory, see as many patients with tropical diseases as possible, and, most importantly, spend time working in a disease endemic country in the tropics.

Be good at the job you choose, either as a clinician, a scientist or in the field of public health, because there are many different ways that lead to this position.