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About me

My name is Justin Cottrell and I'm a PGY-2 in Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (OHNS) at the University of Toronto. I went to college for audio production, completed an undergraduate degree in Biomedical Sciences and medical school at Western University, along with a Business Degree at the Richard Ivey School of Business. My hometown is Port Perry, Ontario.

Why I chose Otolaryngology

I've always loved working with my hands, whether it be in construction or playing music. I had some incredible mentors in medical school who took me under their wing and gave me clinical experience in a variety of areas.

I had developed an appreciation for the anatomy of the head and neck previously working in the Arts. The attention to aesthetic detail and function is also found in Otolaryngology. The scope of practice is so wide with fascinating physiology underpinning all of our senses and provides rewarding encounters with acute and chronic patients.

Clinical Life

What kinds of rotations are required in your program?

Our residency program has a combination of on- and off-service rotations in our first two years while we complete Foundations of Surgery. Our off-service rotations include Anesthesia, Critical Care, Emergency Medicine, General Surgery, Internal Medicine, Neurosurgery, Plastic Surgery, and Radiology.

Our program covers eight core hospitals as well as multiple community hospitals, giving us a wide variety of different practices to learn from.

In our second year, we are provided four dedicated blocks of research. This gives us an opportunity to delve deeper into the different subspecialties and create a foundation for future academic pursuits.



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What does a typical day of clinical duties involve?

Weekly Schedule at a Glance							
	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
06:00	On-Call			Home Call			Home Call
07:00						Grand Rounds	
08:00		Research	Research	Research	Research	Half-Day	
09:00	Home Call						
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
13:00							Research
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
18:00				Home Call			Home Call
19:00							
20:00							
21:00							
22:00							
23:00							
00:00							

Which of your personality characteristics are particularly helpful in your field?

I believe curiosity in residency can be a great asset. Having something that energizes your daily work makes the experience so much more fulfilling, even when you're testing your limits. It's such an exciting time, we've come so far in the care we can provide patients. Yet, there are still so many questions left to answer. Patients frequently surprise you, embracing the unknowns and the potential for the future gives an excitement in residency that pushes you forward.

What are the best aspects of your residency?

I was lucky to explore different careers before pursuing medicine which I reflect on often. Surgical residency has been my most challenging endeavor to date, but the small wins with patients throughout the day add up, providing immense fulfillment. I consider myself extremely lucky to work with inspiring colleagues, to be surrounded by exciting innovations, and to have a job that has such a positive impact on people's lives.

What are the most challenging aspects of your residency?

One of the most challenging aspects of residency is seeing the strains on our healthcare system, and the effects this has on patients and healthcare providers. We need a work environment that builds people up to give them the opportunity to realize their full potential and feel proud of their work.

Otolaryngology Resident Profile — Justin Cottrell

I feel powerless at times to the overwhelming capacity constraints occurring in our system. While there are numerous reasons, I believe it's a major driver of the burnout we see amongst our physicians, nursing, and other allied health colleagues.

This in turn can impact our workplace collegiality, resulting in a toxic work environment. As I go into my third year of residency, I hope to try and improve hospital dynamics to ensure patients, caregivers, and healthcare workers are taken care of and respected.

What is one question you're often asked about your residency?

I think the most recent thing I'm getting asked about is our transition to CBME. Our year, and our specialty, were the first to officially roll out the Royal College's CBD curriculum, and as other programs follow suit, there is lots of interest with what worked and what didn't work based on our experience. I think strong leadership and open communication will be one of the most important factors to determine the success of this new process. We have been lucky in that our program is working with us, and checking in frequently, to see where improvements can be made. I believe if done properly, CBME as a tool can have the potential to enhance resident education.

Can you describe the transition from clerkship to residency?

There was a huge jump in workload going from clerkship to residency. However, the level of fulfillment increased as well. It's great immersing yourself in what you love and embarking down a path that excites you.

Just like medical school, the information load in residency continues to feel like you're drinking out of a firehose. However, I find it's much more practical and easier to solidify key concepts now, as I've always found it more difficult to learn and synthesize materials from readings and lectures. As time goes on, it becomes more and more fulfilling seeing your knowledge translate into true impact for patients.

What are your future practice plans?

Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery has a large variety of general and subspecialty practice types to explore in both academic and community settings. I am hoping to pursue an academic practice that will allow me to continue building on my research interests, and am currently exploring the different subspecialty areas to determine what I have a stronger affinity to.



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What are your fellow residents like, how do you interact with each other?

My fellow residents are absolutely incredible people. Our program is large and diverse, which brings a wide variety of experiences and skills to the table. We have strong female leaders, top talented individuals from international schools, and highly accomplished academics and clinicians. It makes for an engaging environment to work in and grow.

Each year of residency brings unique challenges and hurdles, yet despite the high workload on all of us, we often find time to check in on each other to make sure we're okay, and to identify ways of improving our current

processes. I feel like we're a team working for a common goal to take care of our patients as we develop our skills in the specialty. It can sometimes be difficult for us to get our minds off of work, however when we do get the chance to unwind, we have lots of fun. I'm lucky to be surrounded by such a great group.

Non-Clinical Life

What are your academic interests?

I enjoy being engaged in research as a creative outlet contributing to the profession. I find that as I gain more experience with different research projects, that it allows me to better interpret existing literature for incorporation into clinical practice.

What is your work-life balance like, and how do you achieve this?

I'm lucky to have such a large and loving family spread out across the globe. Hearing all the stories coming from my parents, five brothers, sister, nieces and nephews brings me lots of joy. They are what I prioritize when I have free time and a major source of support and inspiration as I chart my path

Disclaimer: These specialty profiles illustrate some aspects of the lives of individual residents, and convey their personal perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and rewards of their chosen fields. These views may not be shared by all residents, as there is tremendous diversity in lifestyle, experience, and interest among the residents in each specialty.