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Selection Alliance

A journey to medicine: **Preparing your students**

May 2018

Start



A journey to medicine: Preparing your students

How to use this booklet

This is the first of five booklets developed for teachers and advisers in secondary schools and colleges. This booklet takes you through helping your students to consider whether medicine is for them and, if so, to help them prepare for a future application. The suggestions in this booklet can be used by students aged 13 upwards.

This booklet takes you through the considerations and experience that are recommended for students to fully understand the role of a doctor and what it will be like to study medicine.

There is information for students with a disability, and if this affects any of your students you are encouraged to read this early in the process of your students considering medicine.

This booklet is particularly aimed at those schools and colleges that have limited experience of supporting students in their application to medicine. It has been produced by the Medical Schools Council and is endorsed by all member undergraduate medical schools in the UK.

The information relates to UK medical schools only. It is correct and accurate at the time of publication (May 2018). It will be updated annually but we advise you to check individual medical school websites.

The Medical Schools Council's resources for students and teachers or advisers is available online. Visit www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/applications/resources-for-students-and-teachers for more information.



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The role of a doctor

The most important first step is for your students to understand what being a doctor is really like.

There are over 50 different types of medical career that all offer different experiences.

The roles can range from being a GP based in the community and dealing with patients every day, to a surgeon operating in a specialist hospital, through to working in a laboratory to identify new treatments. All start with a degree in medicine.

Doctors prevent, diagnose, care for and treat patients with illness, disease and injury and work to maintain physical and mental health. They have a desire to help people. They supervise the implementation of care and treatment plans by others in the healthcare team and conduct medical education and research. For some patients there may be no cure and doctors will try and maximise the quality of the patient's life with appropriate palliative care. Doctors will take the final responsibility for difficult clinical decisions.

A medical career should not be embarked on lightly. There is significant training that begins at university and continues once qualified. Doctors need to be constantly learning and developing their skills.

Students will not need to decide on their final career now but they do need to understand what the life of a doctor will be like. This booklet will help you to support their research and understanding.

“All healthcare professionals aspire to ‘save lives’ and ‘cure patients’. Medicine is advancing at such a rate that new treatments are available almost weekly. However, the demographics of the UK have changed dramatically. With few exceptions, whatever branch of medicine you enter, you will be dealing with older people, with multiple conditions, many of which cannot be cured, but can only be managed, and which ultimately will end the person's life. Consequently, the UK medical workforce needs more generalists and less specialists. But giving a patient a good quality of life, and a good death, can be equally rewarding.”

Dr Suzanne Dawson, Admissions Tutor Leicester Medical School and Consultant Geriatrician University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

For more information

All the organisations involved in representing and training doctors have an agreed statement that describes the role of a doctor: www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/applications/resources-for-students-and-teachers.

For more information about the different roles in health, encourage your students to explore the Health Careers website: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles.

For more information on the careers opportunities available as a doctor, visit the Health Careers website: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors.

Student activity

30 minutes

Ask your students to choose three medical specialties. If you have four or more students considering medicine, ask them to work in groups of at least two. For each of the specialties ask them to:

- Describe the specialty in 10 words
- Consider what the most rewarding part of the role would be for them
- Consider what the most challenging part of the role would be for them

What makes a good doctor?

Students may have dreamed of becoming a doctor from an early age. Alternatively, they may have considered it later on in secondary school or post-16 study. Importantly, they will need to have, or to develop, the appropriate attributes to be a good doctor.

The attributes for good doctors are:

- Good communication skills
- Resilience
- Conscientiousness
- The ability to work as part of a team
- Non-judgemental behaviour
- Empathy and integrity
- Listening skills
- Ability to apply knowledge and skills to synthesise information and make a decision
- Ability to build trusting relationships
- Ability to assimilate new knowledge critically
- Ability to manage uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity effectively
- Ability to work out solutions from first principles when the pattern does not fit
- Ability to reflect on their own practice

“Being a good doctor is about interacting with others. With patients, you need to be able to build a relationship through listening, finding out their concerns and ideas. Your response shapes how much they trust you and are willing to share. You then apply your knowledge to try to manage the issue in partnership with the patient. Being a good colleague is equally important, having a good work ethic, being calm under pressure and resilient. There will be moments of excitement and happiness, as well as sadness and stress; dealing with both and being able to support each other is important.”

Dr Paul Paes, Consultant and Sub Dean- Admissions, School of Medical Education, Newcastle University

For more information

To consider the type of careers in the health service that may suit your students, encourage them to take the Careers Quiz: www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk.

The values and attributes needed to study medicine are available on the Medical Schools Council website.

Visit www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/applications/resources-for-students-and-teachers.

Student activity

30 minutes

Ask your students to consider one of the four domains within the ‘values and attributes needed to study medicine’ found on the Medical Schools Council website. The domains are:

- Knowledge skills and performance
- Safety and quality
- Communication, partnership and teamwork
- Maintaining trust

Encourage your students to look at the values and attributes and consider:

- Do they have the skills and attributes required?
- How will they demonstrate the skills and attributes using examples from their everyday life and experiences?
- What do they need to do in order to build their skills and competencies?

Other roles in healthcare

Many students will have their heart set on becoming a doctor but they should remember there are over 300 careers in the health sector which do not require a degree in medicine.

There is a range of clinical careers in nursing or the allied health professions.

Nurses are the largest staff group in the National Health Service. Nurses are required to obtain a nursing degree. There are four specialist fields:

- Adult nursing
- Children's nursing
- Learning disability nursing
- Mental health nursing

Allied health professionals deliver care to patients in hospitals, the community, homes and schools. They work directly with patients, making independent assessments and decisions about treatment. The roles are varied and include podiatrists, dieticians and physiotherapists. There are also:

- Therapeutic radiographers, who play a key part in treating people with life-threatening cancers
- Occupational therapists, who can help people regain independence after a serious illness or injury
- Arts therapists, who help people come to terms with, and recover from, severe mental health conditions such as depression or addiction

There are also a significant number of non-clinical roles within the NHS. These can range from management and leadership, financial management, human resources, administration, facilities through to catering and fundraising.

Whatever role your students choose, they will make a big difference to patients and their care.

For more information

To see the breadth of health careers, visit www.healthcareers.nhs.uk.

Student activity

30 minutes

Encourage your students to take the Health Careers Quiz. The quiz is available at www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk/careers/take-the-test.



What your student can expect at medical school

When your student starts medical school they are embarking on lifelong education and training.

They will study at medical school for up to six years with clinical placements in hospitals and community settings. After graduation there will be a further two-year Foundation Programme that all medical graduates must complete. Following the foundation years they will then enter specialist training, for example general practice, surgery or psychiatry. The length and nature of the training depends on the specialty and can range from three to five years. Once a doctor is qualified they are expected to continue their professional development throughout their career.

Each medical school is different and will offer a different curriculum but all will lead to the same outcomes required by the General Medical Council. Most medical schools will include an outline of their particular curriculum on their website.

Year 1

Usually the students will be introduced to the fundamentals of the clinical sciences needed to succeed at medicine. Some medical schools will build in clinical placements into this part of the course but it is usually largely university-based.

Year 2

Students will build on the fundamentals of clinical sciences. Some medical schools will include clinical placements.

Year 3

The number of clinical placements that students undertake will increase. Some medical schools will offer research opportunities.

Year 4

There will be further clinical placements which will help to build the students' knowledge and understanding.

Year 5

A focus on the student's transition to becoming a doctor.

Starting medical school can be daunting, with students often having to adjust to a new town or city and make new friends.

The transition from school or college to university and medical school can be a difficult time for students. Medical schools will offer support at transition to university and throughout a student's studies. Students will find different approaches to teaching, subjects which they have not studied before and different types of examination. Your students need to be prepared that they will not have all the answers and they must not be afraid to make mistakes.

Encourage your students to consider what it would be like. A medical degree is a full-time course and requires good organisational skills. It will push your students academically and physically but there are significant rewards.

“Use open days and post-offer visit days (plus live online chat events if available) to add to the information found on websites. How much patient contact in clinical settings will you have? When does it happen in the course? What does a weekly timetable look like? What the exams are like? As well as helping you make the right choice of medical schools, questions about the course may come up at interview. These days are your chance to talk directly to admissions staff, teaching staff and current students, all of whom will be keen to tell you as much as possible.”

Dr Paul Docherty Admissions Tutor,
Hull York Medical School

For more information

The Foundation Programme website provides more information on the type of training medical graduates do. Visit www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk.

Student activity

30 minutes

Medicine is a difficult subject and no student will be able to get it right all the time. It is important that students are resilient when they make mistakes and learn from this. Ask your students:

- How do you feel when you make a mistake?
- What is the most recent mistake you have made?
- What did you learn from your mistake?
- Can you describe a mistake that helped you to think more deeply about a problem?

Preparing students

In addition to academic achievement, medical schools are looking for students who can demonstrate an understanding of what a career in medicine involves and are suitable for working in a caring profession. Medical schools are looking for individuals who have commitment, perseverance, initiative, concern for others and the ability to communicate.

Encourage your students to seek out experiences and develop their interests and skills prior to their application to medicine. They may need to reflect on it in their personal statement or in interviews.

Participation in higher education outreach

Students should be encouraged to participate in higher education outreach schemes, which are typically run by universities. All medical schools provide events and activities for young people to help them in their higher education pathway, including making an application. The outreach differs by university and medical school but many offer activities based in secondary schools or the university (including talks and workshops), schemes that target and support students with the potential to study medicine, and open days.

Try to find out what is happening at your local medical school.

During the admissions process, students should refer to any relevant experience gained on an outreach programme. Medical schools understand that the student will have attended outreach activities at universities other than where they may finally apply.

“Medicine is one of the most notoriously difficult degree courses to get on to, especially for young people who feel that they may not be the ‘right sort’ to apply. However outreach programmes are doing a wonderful job in raising aspirations and giving meaningful advice that gives many young people the opportunities to make informed decisions about their future. I would encourage any teacher who has a student that expresses an interest in medicine to use the information in this booklet and try to help their student access outreach that may be life changing!”

Darren Beaney, Head of Admissions,
Recruitment and Widening Participation,
Brighton and Sussex Medical School

Wider interests

Most medical schools will expect a student to show that they have a life outside of studying. These interests can also provide evidence of other skills and attributes, such as working with others, good time management, and being able to relax away from study. These non-academic interests do not have to be ‘high-powered’. Not every medical student has to have been captain of a sports team. But students should be able to demonstrate what they have gained from their non-academic activities.



Preparing students

Work and voluntary experience

As part of the selection process, most medical schools look at an applicant's work and voluntary experience. They will want to see applicants who have:

- Had people focused experience of providing care, or help to other people, and understand the realities of working in a caring profession
- Developed some of the attitudes and behaviours essential to being a doctor, such as conscientiousness, good communication skills, and the ability to interact with a wide variety of people
- Reflected on their experiences and can explain what they have learned about themselves and their attributes and how has this influenced their understanding of the career
- A realistic understanding of medicine and in particular the physical, organisational and emotional demands of a medical career

Most medical schools do not set a minimum number of hours of work experience that applicants need to undertake, but many will expect it to have taken place in the two years before an application.

There are two basic types of experience that applicants can have, which can provide different skills and experiences:

- Working with other people in a caring or service role, and in particular with people who are ill, disabled or disadvantaged.
- Direct observation of healthcare

Students can gain caring experience (on a paid or voluntary basis) in a number of different settings including care homes for the elderly, hospitals, hospices, nurseries, special schools, community-based settings or by volunteering to provide first aid or other support services. Medical schools recognise that practical experience in hospices and residential homes can be as appropriate as work in a conventional healthcare setting such as a hospital or GP surgery.

Paid employment or voluntary work in areas outside of healthcare can help students to demonstrate some of the attributes and behaviours required for medicine, such as working with people, teamwork and communication skills.

Medical schools do not generally support or encourage overseas clinical work experience. They are looking for applicants who have an understanding of the UK health service either by undertaking clinical work experience or by talking to UK doctors or other health professionals.

The most important thing is that your students should reflect on their experiences and be able to express what they have learned about themselves and medicine.

Students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the relevant skills and attributes that the profession requires by reflecting on and drawing from their experience. Encourage your students to complete a reflective log.

For more information

The Medical Schools Council has work experience guidelines for applicants to medicine.

Visit www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/applications/resources-for-students-and-teachers.

The NHS has produced guidance for teachers and advisers who are seeking work experience placements for their students in the health sector. Visit

www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/career-advisers-and-teachers/work-experience-toolkit.

For information on voluntary opportunities, visit the government's website for a helpful list of organisations that can help your students find something to suit them. Visit www.gov.uk/volunteering.

Student activity

30 minutes

It is important that your students prepare before work experience. They should consider what they wish to learn more about, or how they want to use the experience to explore their skills and attributes. Before your students complete any work experience, ask them to consider the following questions:

- What skills, values and attributes (for example empathy or teamwork) am I already able to demonstrate and how will this particular experience help me to provide greater evidence of these and to develop new ones?
- How can work experience help me to demonstrate the values and attributes for being a good doctor?
- What might be the most interesting aspect of the work experience?
- What five questions should I ask health professionals during my work experience?

Preparing students

Building an understanding of medicine.

Direct observation and experience of healthcare is valuable. Students can gain a lot of knowledge of medicine from talking to people involved in healthcare or undertaking research. Practising healthcare professionals and current medical students can give great insight into life as a doctor.

Encourage your students to read up on the subject and look at relevant free news articles, research publications and websites. For example, the Guardian's science pages include medical and health developments, as do the Telegraph's health pages. The British Medical Journal has an open access journal that is available to students. There are also many podcasts and films available online.

Medical schools have resources on their websites and hold open days, courses and workshops.

“The desire to study medicine is often judged by a student's interest in the subject. This can be made clear by talking about something you have read or seen. A stunning array of material is available – a personal favourite is the TED talks on YouTube. Over 2,000 talks, most less than an hour, others less than six minutes, delivered by experts. For example, you can discover how dodgy science can lead to wacky health claims in newspapers and the importance of epidemiological studies to medicine (Ben Goldacre, *Battling Bad Science*, 2011). Ben, in his brief talk, provokes and informs but above all, he is really entertaining.”

Dave Wilson, Professor of Medical Education,
Director of Admissions, Cardiff University School of Medicine

For more information

The Guardian's science pages: www.theguardian.com/science.

The Telegraph's health pages: www.telegraph.co.uk/health.

The British Medical Journal's open access information: bmjopen.bmj.com.

The TED talks can provide useful background and information: www.ted.com/talks.

Student activity

30 minutes

It is important for your students to have read properly around the subject, using relevant and appropriate materials. Fifteen minutes of focused activity, reading or watching relevant material can be more useful than several hours surfing the internet.

Ask your students to work in groups to:

- Consider what they could learn from different sources of information
- List all the sources of information about medicine they can think of
- Determine which are the three most important sources of information from this list
- Consider how they would use this information to inform themselves

Students with a disability

Medical schools welcome applications from disabled students and appreciate the experience the positive impact that a diverse cohort of students achieves. Medical schools will seek, wherever possible, to make any reasonable adjustments to assist students who have specific health or disability requirements and challenges. The medical school has the responsibility to ensure that all graduating students are able to meet the outcomes for graduation set by the GMC. Therefore, the medical school has to consider the impact of any disability on an applicant's ability to meet these outcomes. Adjustments will be made to help students meet the outcomes.

All medical schools follow the Higher Education Occupational Physicians/ Practitioners (HEOPS) guidance on standards of medical fitness to train as a medical student.

Students who are interested in medicine and who have serious concerns that a medical condition or disability may have implications for their ability to complete the course should contact the medical school or schools in which they are interested at a very early stage; certainly, before making a formal application.

“Reasonable adjustments can be made for many but not all disabilities. We welcome enquiries from potential applicants with disabilities, prior to their application. Where appropriate, we will arrange to meet with the applicant to discuss the nature of the degree programme and its requirements. We may also refer the student to for an Occupational Health assessment and/or to spend some time in our clinical skills centre, so that the student can make an informed decision as to whether they are likely to be able to complete the course. Disability status does not prejudice our selection process.”

Dr Julian Burton, Director of Undergraduate Medical Admissions, University of Sheffield Medical School

There is an obligation for medical schools to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities where the disability would not prevent the student from fulfilling the required competencies to graduate.

There are some skills and competencies that a student has to demonstrate before they can graduate. While reasonable adjustments will be made to help students undertake these tasks, a student cannot be exempted from any of the competency standards required for graduation. These standards are set by the General Medical Council and are available in Outcomes for graduates. Before they graduate, every student must have met these outcomes and the medical school must have no concerns about their fitness to practise.

For more information

Higher Education Occupational Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) guidance on standards of medical fitness to train as a medical student and in other health professions: www.heops.org.uk/guide.php.

For more information regarding students with a disability applying to study medicine see Medical students: professional values and fitness to practise, produced by the Medical Schools Council and the General Medical Council: www.medschools.ac.uk/our-work/student-fitness-to-practise.

The General Medical Council's outcomes for graduates: www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/standards-and-outcomes/outcomes-for-graduates.

Gateways to the professions (advice for medical schools in supporting disabled students): www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/gateways-to-the-professions.

Supporting students with mental health conditions: www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/supporting-medical-students-with-mental-health-conditions.

Achieving good medical practice: www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/achieving-good-medical-practice.



The Medical Schools Council represents the
interests and ambitions of UK medical schools

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