

Guidance for medical students on travel and clinical placements

Throughout the autumn term medical students have been able to access clinical placements even as the situation regarding Covid 19 admissions has worsened in many parts of the country. The fact you are still able to access learning opportunities in clinical environments is thanks to a concerted effort by placement providers and medical schools to keep placements going. We also recognise that maintaining clinical placements is a positive reflection on the professional values you are exhibiting yourselves whilst on placement. We have heard from medical schools and Trusts that supervisors have given positive feedback about the behaviour and dedication of students over this period.

We are aware that the issue of student travel has been raised across the UK and to help you with deciding when and how to travel we have produced this guidance for you.

Medical students are essential workers

The key information you should be aware of is that across the UK healthcare students are deemed to be essential workers. This means you can travel to and from your clinical placements just as any other healthcare worker can. You will also have been provided with PPE whilst on placement which reduces the chance that you will catch or transmit Covid 19.

Remote placements

Some students will be undertaking placements that are some distance away from their base at university. The distance students need to travel varies across the country and some of you will be staying in accommodation at remote sites to facilitate your attendance at these placements. Medical schools understand that this is a difficult situation and that students may wish to return to their base at university when they are not timetabled to be on placement to access support from family and friends.

The key priority for medical schools, and students themselves, is to keep placements open and available as learning opportunities and in due course for students to progress and graduate. As students classed as essential workers it may be possible for them to return to their fixed, term time address when not on placement. However, this is dependent on local and national policies and you should follow the guidelines set by your medical school.

Travelling to visit friends and family

When travelling to and from your term time address you will be aware that social distancing and travel restrictions vary across the UK and you must follow the guidance being applied where you live. You should also note that at present there is a requirement that students do not leave their term time address to stay at another location overnight. This may include your family home, if this is not your term time address.

The only travel that you should undertake is that which is necessary for you to undertake clinical placements. Travelling to see friends and family during term time may put vulnerable people at risk, especially if you are an asymptomatic carrier.

Travelling home once term ends

You will be aware that governments across the UK are putting in place plans to facilitate the safe return of students to their family and friends once term ends. You must comply with whatever guidance is in place in the part of the UK where you live.

If you are undertaking clinical placements at the end of term then you will still be able to complete these placements. Governments have put in exemptions for healthcare students in terms of their policies around students returning home at the end of term as they recognise these students are essential workers.

MSC has noted the recent guidance issued by the Department for Education on students returning for the winter break and has discussed this internally and with DfE. Students are able to complete their placements where schools have deemed that it is essential, for example where placement students are being asked to assist in forthcoming vaccination programmes or where a failure to complete the placement would have future workforce implications. It has therefore been agreed that if local arrangements permit it, students may stay in placements beyond 9 December.

Your medical school and university will be in touch to provide you with further advice as to how they will operationalise the applicable government guidance.