

## Work experience - advice for students

If you are planning to apply to study medicine in the UK, all medical schools now require applicants to have experience in a caring or service role, either paid or voluntarily, in a health or related field, as well as direct observation of healthcare.

As well as giving you a taste of medicine to ensure it is a career that you want, work experience also aims to give you an understanding of the emotional and physical demands that make up being a medical professional.

Read more from the Medical Schools Council helpful document on [work experience for medical school applicants](#)

- **How to get a placement**

"Applying for medicine is tough, so don't be disheartened because someone says no."

- Be realistic. If you haven't got good GCSE or equivalent grades (at least 8 grade As) you are unlikely to be considered by a medical school and therefore less likely to get a placement.
- Some hospital departments will not allow shadowing by anyone under 18 and most GP practices specify a minimum age of 16 for patient observations.
- Places often fill up so organise your placement as soon as possible and some applications are often only open for a few weeks a year.
- Make sure your work experience covers as broad a range as possible. For example, as well as time at a GP surgery and within an NHS Trust, consider getting a period at another care setting such as a community hospital, hospice, care home, with an occupational physician, a PhD student or at a pharmacy. Alternative placements can be more flexible with work hours as well, so it's always worth asking.
- It takes time. Be polite but persistent. Doctors and NHS facilities are generally extremely busy. You may need to apply to many places before you get a positive response and even getting a response can take some time.
- Try getting in touch with GP practices. Contact practice managers and GPs to explain who you are and ask for their help. Many will ask you to complete an application form. Use your contacts
- Make the most of any contacts or friends of the family, neighbours, etc. who work in healthcare or in a hospital, no matter what role they have, it could be an administrator for example. The NHS is the biggest employer in the UK with over 1.7 million employees, so it's likely that you know someone who works in the NHS who may be able to introduce you to opportunities you may not have considered.

- In addition you could think whether you have an older relative that might be under the care of a hospital specialist that you could approach.
- If you are still at school or college, speak to your school or sixth-form careers coordinator or a teacher who can help you with arranging placements
- If you can't shadow a doctor, look at shadowing another healthcare professional like a pharmacist or physiotherapist.
- It is not expected that you should have to pay for a work experience placement, wherever it may be. The BMA does not encourage healthcare professionals to charge students for placements, however there may be instances where you could be asked to cover costs such as administration. Don't be afraid to ask what, if any, costs you may be asked to pay before starting your placement.

### • Practical tips when on placement

- Dress smartly as you would for a job interview
- Be aware that some patients may wish to be seen without a student present. Don't take this personally.
- Remember that patient confidentiality is important. You must not, under any circumstances, discuss patient issues outside of the department or practice you are based in. As such you may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.
- It would be inappropriate for you to see a patient that is known to you socially, whether it be a family member or friend. If this happens you should tell the person who is supervising you and leave the room.
- Don't be shy. Make sure you tell your placement what you expect to get out of it and let them know if there is anything in particular that you would like to do or learn whilst you're there.
- Keep a log/ daily diary of what you did and saw. This can help solidify what you learn but is also an important reference tool when you are writing a personal statement and preparing for your medical school interviews.
- Pick up leaflets and other information from clinics to serve as a reference for the future.
- Try to speak to a diverse range of staff. Time with other health care workers can offer a great insight into the multidisciplinary approach to healthcare.
- Ask questions and show enthusiasm. Ask the doctors about what they think are the qualities of a good doctor, ask them about their work patterns, lifestyle or whether they would choose medicine again as a career.
- Talk to patients - remember to be polite and introduce yourself as a medical school applicant on work experience.
- Be proactive and offer a pair of helping hands at every opportunity. Simply opening a door for patients, or offering to take a wheelchair bound patient back to the ward will show staff your enthusiasm and willingness to learn and help.