

# Work experience guidelines for applicants to medicine



Most UK medical schools will look at an applicant's work experience as part of the selection process. This document defines work experience as any activity that allows you to demonstrate:

- That you have had people focused experience of providing care or help to other people and that you understand the realities of working in a caring profession.
- That you have 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.
- That you have a realistic understanding of medicine and in particular the physical, organisational and emotional demands of a medical career.

This ability to demonstrate the elements above will be assessed by medical schools in different ways, for example when they consider your personal statement and references, or at interview.

Most medical schools do not set a minimum number of hours of work experience that applicants need to undertake. There are no rules as to what types of work experience you should undertake apart from the fact that it should fit with the three objectives set out above. However many medical schools do expect experience to be recent in that whatever type of experience you have it should have happened in the two years before you apply.

The ability to demonstrate and reflect on what you learn, about yourself and about medicine, through work experience is the key thing medical schools are looking for when they assess your work experience. This ability to reflect on what you learnt from your work experience may be assessed via your personal statement or at interview.

You should bear in mind the general principles for work experience set out below.

**Remember: it is what you learn about yourself, about other people and about how effective care is delivered and received that counts, not what you did. What you did is only half the story: make sure you show us what attributes you demonstrated and what you learned.**

## General Principles

- There are two basic types of work experience that applicants can have:
  - Working with other people in a caring or service role, and in particular with people who are ill, disabled or disadvantaged. (Strongly recommended)
  - Direct observation of healthcare.
- You can gain caring experience (on a paid or voluntary basis) in a number of different settings including care homes for the elderly, hospices, nurseries and special schools or by volunteering to provide first aid or other support services.
- Paid employment may provide valuable work experience, especially where it involves extensive interaction with people and team working (for example catering or customer service). It can help you demonstrate some of the attitudes and behaviours needed to study medicine.
- All forms of voluntary work can provide helpful work experience. Volunteer work is available in a number of different sectors including the health service. More information on volunteer opportunities is available online from numerous organisations including [Step up to Serve](#) and the [NCVO](#).
- Voluntary commitments to community groups (for example groups related to the work of churches, mosques and temples, or other groups such as Scouts or Guides) may also provide valuable experience of taking on responsibility, dealing with people and communicating effectively.
- Whilst an understanding of medicine as a career is essential, you can gain this by talking to practising doctors about their experiences and other forms of research (such as reading relevant documents, publications and websites) rather than by direct observation of healthcare alone. Medical schools are looking for evidence that you understand the role of a doctor and the values required to practise medicine. Therefore, in all workplace settings, you should consider the attitudes and behaviours of the staff working in those environments.
- In the UK doctors provide care in a number of different settings not just hospitals. Increasingly care is being delivered in community settings. Therefore healthcare experience gained in any setting whether hospital-based or community-based is equally valuable.
- An understanding of the undergraduate medical degree is also important and can be gained by talking to current medical students and junior doctors, as well as attending open days, courses, or workshops delivered by your local medical school.
- There is little benefit in repeating the same type of work experience. Undertaking repeated periods of direct observation of health care ('Shadowing') is unlikely to be of benefit. Longer experience of working with the public, in particular people who are ill, disabled or disadvantaged, can be more valuable.
- Some medical schools may consider evidence that you have cared for elderly, disabled or unwell friends or family as relevant. However in your application it is important to recognise that providing care as a health professional differs in several ways and so other forms of work experience are valuable.
- Medical schools do not generally support or encourage overseas clinical work experience. Medical schools 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. However, if you have elected to arrange clinical work experience abroad this should be justified in your personal statement.
- For overseas applicants to UK medical schools, or those with strong family connections overseas, work experience can take place in their home country. Work experience in the NHS is not expected for overseas students. These students can gain an understanding of the UK health service through research if they are unable to gain UK work experience. Any difficulties arranging work experience should be detailed in your personal statement.