

Medicine and Dentistry tips

Students who are considering applying to Medicine or Dentistry degree courses may find the below tips helpful.

Secondary School Students

It is never too early to research and prepare for university. Firstly, it is important that you are aware of what GCSE grades and subjects universities require. These are called the entry requirements.

When you apply to a Medicine or Dentistry course the university admissions staff will read your personal statement looking for evidence that you understand what these career paths involve.

It is easy to say you 'have' a skill, anyone can say this, but with clear examples you can evidence how you have gained and used these skills. You should also think about undertaking the following:

Read one or two newspaper articles a week specifically relating to health

- A good understanding of the NHS and medical developments is essential. Health is not a straightforward topic, be sure to gather different viewpoints. There are suggested web-sites at the bottom of this page.
- Explain the articles fully and clearly to another person - this will test your understanding and how well you can articulate this to others. Communication is a vital skill and is NOT easy.

List all of the roles you are aware of in the NHS (there are over 300!)

Consider what specific skills these roles require, i.e., a GP is like a detective, they have to be critical thinkers/problem solvers who look at all the symptoms and determine what might be the problem, a dentist has to be dextrous with their hands and are often also skilful in textiles, art or music

Volunteer or join a sports club and keep a journal

“Any experience you gain, write down that evening what you saw and what you learnt and gained from it. This way you can look over it before your application/interview to remind yourself and it will then be fresh in your mind.”

- Give up your own time to help others; experience in a care or health related environment provides vital insight to patient care
- Make a note of the roles you have undertaken either in a club or volunteering and the skills you have improved
- Reflect on how you could have communicated better?
- What was your first impression of a situation or an issue and how did this change?
- Did you find it hard working in a team or dislike working on a task alone?
- It is not enough to say you want to 'help people' be aware, during your experiences, of the ways health and care professionals cannot help people or the difficulties they may face in attempting to do so.

Consider how you communicate

Below are some scenarios a medical professional might face. Put yourself in their shoes - how would you handle this situation? Consider the words you would use when speaking to the patient? This activity works best if you discuss this with another person.

Case study 1

You are a GP in a local practice. It is approaching the end of the day. A patient is explaining to you a series of symptoms: they feel tired all the time and are experiencing pains in their upper abdomen after eating. Your next appointment is in 4 minutes. There are a number of things the symptoms could be. What additional questions do you need to ask the patient about their symptoms? What will you need to decide?

Case study 2

A patient has been referred to you as a gastroenterologist. They are suffering with problems. The patient is over-weight and smokes. You can refer them for surgery but you are aware of the complications which can occur after surgery. The alternative is that the patient improves their lifestyle. How would you explain this to your patient?

Case study 3

An elderly patient is prepped and ready for surgery. As the surgeon what do you need to consider when speaking to the patient before surgery?

Case study 4

You are a paediatrician. The child patient in front of you has asthma. Explain this condition to the child in a serious way that also does not scare them.

Sixth Form Students

Spend time doing your research on the different Universities as the courses can vary a lot. Some have more of a traditional way of teaching involving lectures, others use tutorials where clinical problems are solved in small groups of students (problem based learning). Also it is useful to find out at what stage of the medical degree they let you see patients. Some let you from Year 1 and others are much later. It is all personal preference so just make sure it suits you!"

Researching thoroughly is vital. There are no opportunities for you to transfer from one Medicine or Dentistry course to another one. Be aware QMUL and other institutions do not accept any re-sits. Attend Open Days at universities to gain a full understanding of what they are like and prepare questions in advance. Alongside undertaking your research and gaining work experience also look at the points above under 'secondary school students' and ensure you have completed these suggested activities.

Aptitude Tests

You will need to give yourself enough time to revise for the tests but don't book them too close to the deadline in case you are ill and have to rearrange

UKCAT

- Explores attributes necessary for health care professionals
- No specific curriculum or science content
- No revision required but question practise strongly advised (see UKCAT website)
- Test structure: Verbal Reasoning, Decision Making (new part of the test and will not be scored), Quantitative Reasoning, Abstract Reasoning and Situational Judgement.
- Costs £65 but bursaries are available check <http://www.ukcat.ac.uk/>

BMAT

- Two hour pen and paper test
- Science and Maths based on school curriculum up to the end of KS4
- Three subsections: Aptitude and Skills, Scientific Knowledge and Applications, and Writing Task
- More information: <http://www.admissionstesting-service.org/for-test-takers/bmat>

Work experience – what is it for?

To find out what medical and dental roles really involve. To ensure that you really know this is the right career path for you. The realities of these roles and the skills required are often different to what people assume.

The best advice we can offer is to: maintain realistic expectations. Work experience is unlikely to be thrilling and doctors are very unlikely to allow you to do anything practical because they train for many years to do their jobs. You are going to be watching, listening and completing repetitive tasks. The best students show enthusiasm for these tasks, ask meaningful questions and reflect on what they are witnessing.

Where should I get work experience?

It is often hard to get a lot of work experience in a hospital setting, so try to think out of the box! Other types of work experience can be equally as good for your application such as volunteering with elderly people, working with young children either at school or at youth clubs etc, spending some time in a hospice or a special needs school and volunteering for St. John's Ambulance.

When should I get work experience?

As early and often as possible. It is not about the quantity of the work experience but how well you reflect on it. Always keep a note of every detail: where you did work experience, with who, on which dates, what you saw and learnt.

Why do I need work experience?

Medicine and Dentistry courses are extremely competitive. And there are limited places available. It costs a lot of money and takes a lot of time to train in these professions. Admissions staff need to be confident they are choosing the right students. They can only select people who can evidence they have undertaken work experience. The best personal statements are from students who can clearly explain what they have seen, learned and understood from their work experience and evidence this as proof that they have the skills and knowledge required to undertake the course.

How do I get work experience?

Write and email to find opportunities, but also go in person, where appropriate, and make a good impression. Request one or two days - if you request a weeks' worth of shadowing you are asking for a huge commitment from the staff to be responsible for you. If you impress them and are having a good time you may be able to request longer.

Always research the alternatives to Medicine

There are many reasons why every student should research alternatives to medicine thoroughly. Perhaps you have your heart set on studying Medicine, but if you have never looked into the alternatives you may be missing out on a course you are better suited to. When applying through UCAS you can select up to 4 Medicine or Dentistry courses but the final 5th choice has to be an alternative subject. With high levels of competition it is important the fifth choice is well researched and valid.

Consider - if you don't get an interview or don't pass the interview stage for Medicine or Dentistry; - is an alternative health related degree actually better for you or could you take a gap year and reapply next year? There are graduate entry courses that you can apply for after studying a science undergraduate degree.

“Don't worry about taking a year out, many people do and have used it to their advantage. Some students have done a year as a Health Care Assistant, which enables them to work in a hospital, understand the running's of it and interact with patients. This can be very beneficial for placements later on at medical school.”

Webpages of interest

[Guardian health](#)

[BBC health](#)

[NHS Careers](#)

[General Medical Council](#)

[Medical Schools Council](#)

[TES Growing ambitions](#)