



Guidance on gaining relevant experience to study medicine in the time of Covid-19

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msc Medical
Schools
Council
Selection Alliance

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Introduction

It is a difficult time to try and gain relevant experience in healthcare. The NHS is focusing on dealing with the pandemic, outreach programs have been put on hold, and most paid employment opportunities have been stopped too.

In these circumstances, applicants to medicine will all be in the same situation. All medical schools are aware that the opportunities open to you have been affected and will take this into account. Consequently, medical schools will have to adapt their expectations to the situation applicants find themselves in.

What can you do about this?

Make sure to check the medical school's website for updates on work experience. Additionally, keep in mind that *clinical* work experience is not generally a requirement for applying to medical school in any year.

Why is gaining experience important?

It is important to remember why medical schools look for work experience in an application; this in turn can help you think of the numerous ways that you can demonstrate that you have acquired relevant experience. They want to see that you understand what a career in medicine involves. Work experience, and other related experiences, are only as valuable as the way you talk about them. While you will be expected to show some understanding of what it is like to be a doctor, part of this involves demonstrating that you know what it is like to work in a responsible role, particularly with the public.

What type of experience do you need?

The Medical Schools Council's guidance on work experience sets out what medical schools are looking for in terms of relevant experience to support an application to medical school. Work experience is any activity or life experience that helps you to prepare for medical school.

This means any activity that allows you to demonstrate that you have:

- Had people-focused experience of providing a service, care, support or help to others, and that you understand the realities of working in a caring profession
- Developed some of the values, attitudes and behaviours essential to being a doctor such as conscientiousness, effective communication and the ability to interact with a wide variety of people. The values that medical schools are looking for are set out in the [NHS Constitution](#) and explained in MSC guidance on the [Core values and attributes needed to study medicine](#)
- A realistic understanding of medicine and in particular the physical, organisational and emotional demands of a medical career

Useful links



[Guidance on relevant experience for applying to medical school](#)



[Statement on the core values and attributes needed to study medicine](#)



[MSC Work Experience Infosheet](#)

Practical ways to gain experience

Keep a reflective diary on what is happening in the news and online

Useful links

[Observe GP](#) is a free online platform providing insight into general practice.



Brighton and Sussex Medical School offers [virtual work experience](#) for prospective medical school applicants.



Many healthcare professionals are posting online about their experience of working during the pandemic. Listen to what they have to say and reflect on this. All healthcare professionals can be a valuable source of information and experience, not just doctors. After all, doctors work as part of large teams involving many healthcare professions, so demonstrating that you have a sense of those professions and how they work together will help you in both your personal statement and interview. Remember that some media sources are more reliable than others and that sometimes ‘political spin’ is put on articles to help create a headline.

Websites to explore may include:

- Newspaper pages such as the Guardian’s [science](#) page and The Telegraph’s [health](#) page
- The British Medical Journal’s [open access information](#)
- TED Talks can provide useful [background information](#) on health topics
- Science or health related content on [Twitter](#)
- The [NHS Health Careers](#) website

Make use of online resources

There are some free online resources available that will give you a taste of what working in healthcare is all about. For example:

- Brighton and Sussex Medical School has created a free virtual [work experience course](#) which explores several different medical specialities
- RCGP has also created an interactive platform called [Observe GP](#) which highlights the many different aspects of working in primary care

Volunteer in your spare time

All forms of voluntary work can provide helpful work experience. While volunteer work in the NHS might be disrupted at this time other schemes may still be in operation and worth exploring. Working with other people in a caring or service role, and in particular with people who are ill, disabled or disadvantaged is preferable, but will be difficult to arrange at this time. When undertaking any type of voluntary work, it is essential that you follow the Government's guidelines on social distancing.

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) and online community support groups may also provide valuable experience of taking on responsibility, dealing with people and communicating effectively. It is likely that these sorts of volunteering opportunities will start to run again before healthcare related opportunities are available.

Remember: it is what you learn about yourself, about other people and about how effective care is delivered and received that counts. What you did is only a small part of the story; it is how you communicate what you learnt which matters.

Useful volunteering websites may include, but are not limited to:

- The [Do IT](#) website
- The [Nextdoor](#) website

FAQs about online work experience

Is online experience the equivalent to in-person experience?

Online experience is a really great way to help you gain an understanding of what life is like as a doctor. It can give you a good insight to the working life of different kinds of doctors and other healthcare specialists.

Participating in online or in-person experiences is good, though simply listing those experiences down on your application is not enough. You need to be able to talk about the experience, reflect on what you have learnt about yourself, about other people and about how effective care is delivered and received.

Medical schools understand that it is difficult to get in person experience now. Many people have had to isolate and opportunities to gain experience in a healthcare environment may be limited. All medical schools are aware that the opportunities open to you have been affected and will take this into account.

Will online experience count for my application form for UCAS?

Yes, you can use any type of experience that you have gained in your personal statement, no matter what the setting for this experience was. You can talk about the experiences you have had and the things you have learnt, about medicine as a profession and about yourself in your personal statement.

Merely listing your experiences is not enough; you need to reflect on what you have learnt and what they have taught you about medicine. While many medical schools do not formally assess the personal statement, they may use it to ask you questions about your experiences if invited to

interview. Where appropriate, a comprehensive interview response will include an example of your own experiences to demonstrate your insight into medicine and/or your skill set.

Remember that medical schools usually like to see that you have experienced a range of different things, not just online experiences. We recommend that applicants use this guidance as a way to research and think about ways in which they can gain different insights into medicine.

Will medical schools accept Observe GP and other online experience platforms on my application?

It is important to remember why medical schools look for relevant experience in your application. They want to see that you understand what a career in medicine involves and that you have the key values, skills and attributes required to become a doctor. Taking part in experiences provided by online platforms such as Observe GP may allow you to gain some of this understanding and demonstrate some of those qualities, but remember, it is how you reflect on these experiences and communicate what you have learnt which matters.

I didn't receive a certificate for completing the experience. Will this disadvantage me?

You do not always need to provide proof that you completed some types of experiences. Medical schools would expect applicants to be honest in their application, and falsely claiming that you have done some type of experience when you have not would be viewed as a professionalism concern and would demonstrate a lack of integrity. However, it is always a good idea to check the medical school's admissions pages to see if they require any specific documentation. Taking part in something is only half the story; medical schools will expect you to be

able to explore the insights into medicine you have gained from your experience(s) and reflect on them, as well as identifying the key skills you have demonstrated, and subsequently explaining why such skills are important in medicine.

The Medical Schools Council is the representative
body for UK medical schools

www.medschools.ac.uk

Woburn House
Tavistock Square
London
WC1H 9HD

Tel: +44 (0)20 7419 5494
Email: admin@medschools.ac.uk