Real-life stories - why I chose medicine

We asked several medical students why they chose to study medicine and to give some advice to those considering it as a career choice.

Read their stories below.

Ophthalmologist doctor smiling

- ## 2nd year student

  "Medicine offers such a mix. I wanted something where I could talk to a huge range of people, be challenged to leave my 'comfort zone' and be humbled by what I saw. I also wanted a dynamic job that changed and improved over time, where 'cutting-edge' scientific innovation has a practical application in 'real-life' problem solving. As far as I could see, no other career offered this variety.

  "I did work experience in a local nursing home, in a GP's surgery and at the GMC. These were all valuable experiences and helped me to better understand the nature of the job. I found the nursing home experience both motivating and frustrating, in that I wanted to help the residents, but felt thwarted by my woeful lack of expertise.   It can be pretty difficult getting placements, but it really is worth your while finding out what you are going to spend the rest of your life doing before submitting that UCAS application!" **(Guy, Edinburgh)**

- ## 3rd year students

  "It was always a childhood dream to become a doctor, but after much research in Sixth Form I chose to study medicine because it seemed like a vocation that suited my personality. Caring for patients as people really is at the heart of medicine, and it's a

great privilege to be able to help people when they're at their most vulnerable. The ethos of medicine also appealed to me; I wanted an altruistic career where integrity is important.

"Alongside this, I've always had a genuine interest in health and the causes of ill health, so I knew I'd find medicine intellectually rewarding. I'm a people person, so I knew that I would enjoy working as part of a team with a host of other professionals to treat patients. Medicine's a relatively secure career, offering a multitude of different areas of work - including opportunities for working in the developing world.

"I'm really happy to be studying medicine and I'm excited to eventually practice as a doctor, but medicine isn't for everyone. Caring for the infirm is rarely glamorous and patients aren't always obliging and grateful - the decision to become a doctor has to be your own." **(Stuart, Manchester)**

"A career in medicine has always been at the forefront of my mind, I may not have got there in the orthodox way by leaving school and heading straight to medical school, but finally I am there!

"After school I went to University to study biology at both BSc and MSc level. I was not the kind of student at my school that was deemed academically good enough to study medicine. I enjoyed the degree but knew a career in biological research was not for me, and on completion of my thesis I started a job with a pharmaceutical company as a sales representative. I enjoyed my job it was straight forward, social and well paid, it was a role I was able to fill well, but it was not in anyway what I saw myself doing for the rest of my working life. After much debate and advice I had nothing to lose in making a massive effort to get into medical school. The only job I knew that I wanted to do was medicine. I secured a place on an Access to Medicine course, which got me back up to speed and into the swing of studying again, and from there I secured a place at medical school. Getting the acceptance letter was a very emotional and life changing day. One I will never forget.

"Studying medicine is a privilege, to me medicine is the ultimate career. What other career can you chose which provides constant mental stimulation, a continuous opportunity to learn and progress, flexible working and a decent salary. But most importantly, a career in medicine empowers you to help people, to be respected by others and to feel job satisfaction in a way that is impossible to feel in many other careers. The opportunities are endless, and the choice vast, however along with this comes huge responsibility to individual patients, the population as a whole and the team in which you are working.

"In addition the NHS may receive a great deal of press about its status, but at a time where many people are being made redundant, doctors are still in the same demand. I had to put a great deal of thought into the viability of studying medicine at the age of 27, although jobs are not guaranteed they are still readily available." **(Kate, Brighton)**

- ## 4th year students

"I first thought about a career midway through year 11 at secondary school. Until that point I never considered careers in general, but with GCSE's looming I begun to ask myself what it all was for. Since my strong suits were biology, chemistry, maths and physical education at school, it first entered my head that I should find out more. At this point I would say I was academically strong but certainly not outstanding. I started by reading a few outdated books in our library and some website resources. Becoming more interested, I decided to apply for a voluntary post at a hospital and did some work experience with my local GP surgery. With my interest ever increasing, I eventually went to several medical school open days and took the opportunity to talk to staff and current students. This was when my desire to study medicine was confirmed.

"Medicine has its roots in science which was my primary interest in school. I appreciated the role of using a scientific basis to improve the healthcare of the population. I knew from previous work and by my general personality that I was someone suited to an ever evolving job that requiring lifelong learning. I felt I had the foundation of interpersonal skills required and that I would enjoy the diversity and broad career options medicine provided, including opportunities for research. I also considered the down sides of pursuing a career in medicine, including long work hours, many exams and the stress of difficult patients, law suits etc. I felt confident that the positives far outweighed the negatives after considering these aspects and advice from talking to various doctors I came across.

"Medicine is virtually unique in that it is a degree that sets you on a road to a career for life. At 17 like I was, you are very young at it is a massive decision to comprehend and make. Looking back 5 years on, I feel the only way to be sure is to get as much experience and insight into the profession as possible. Of course this applies whether you are 17 and at school, or if you are 32 and working in industry. Even then, you may leave yourself with a small leap of faith, but you are much less likely to be disappointed in the outcome than otherwise.

"There is no doubt medicine is a challenging but rewarding career and if you are interested, you owe it to yourself to do as much as possible to find out more." **(Paul, Brighton)**

"Why medicine? I'm a geek; I love science, and I love a challenge. I also really enjoy working with and understanding people. I chose medicine because it offered me the opportunity to integrate these interests and apply them in a very practical profession. From examining patients to phlebotomy to suturing, it's not just about memorising information, medicine is very much about applied skills. I'm now in my fourth year and I find it hugely rewarding to put together all the pieces of the puzzle- the history elicited

with good communication skills, the knowledge of human biology and the findings from examination and investigations to suggest a diagnosis and be told it was the right one! Medicine is my second degree and the decision to stay a student for another 5 years when my friends were all in gainful employment wasn't an easy one. But it was the right one for me." **(Catherine, Aberdeen)**

- ## Final year students

"I had wanted to become a doctor for many years but to be completely honest I'm not sure why I had made this decision; maybe it was based on television programmes? When the time came to start seriously considering what I wanted to do at University I dedicated a lot of time and thought to making sure I made the right decision, whether that was to study medicine or not.

"I had always enjoyed science at school and as such I was confident that I wanted to study a course at University that incorporated this interest. However, I also wanted to do something that "used" the science I had learnt ie. a job where I could apply what I knew. In addition, I was aware that I liked people contact and didn't just want to be doing desk work. Finally, a career that involved being hands on and carrying out practical tasks and procedures was something that I considered to be important. After some research I was confident that medicine satisfied all of the above and more. Therefore, I organised several different work experience programmes and started to work in a hospice to confirm my thoughts, which they did.

"Now 7 years later as I approach the end of my undergraduate studies, did I make the right decision? Yes, without a doubt. However, without careful planning and research at the beginning it is easy to choose medicine for the wrong reasons. Therefore, if you are considering a career in medicine make sure you think long and hard before you commit." **(Thomas, Manchester)**

"Shortly after starting my A levels I had bacterial meningitis. I made a full recovery physically, but the psychological impact of this life-threatening illness lasted a long time. I had previously been a 'straight A' student, but I became totally disconnected from the education system. I had a poor attendance at school, a bad attitude and just about managed to scrape a few A level passes. Psychological recovery began after school, the following year in Mexico, where I spent a gap year living and working in an inner-city orphanage. I went alone and learnt to speak Spanish fluently. I then applied to do a Nursing Degree with Spanish, at Brighton University, and got a place. I knuckled down to work and came out with a First Class Honours Degree.

"After my nurse training I worked for several years on Intensive Care [1] and Accident & Emergency. I really enjoyed nursing and always felt that I was working 'in the right place'

but gradually became frustrated with some of the clinical and educational restrictions that I felt it placed on me. I suppose I felt that I was not working to my full potential. After some serious soul searching, conversations with medical colleagues and my parents I made the decision to apply to medical school. The application process was not easy and I had to get an A grade in AS level Chemistry at night school whilst working full time as a nurse. The hard work paid off and I started medical school at the age of 28. I have not looked back." **(Rachel, Leicester)**

Links
[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Intensive_care