Published on *Health Careers* (https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk)

Interviews for medical school

This page helps you to prepare for medical school interviews. It explains the format they can take, gives examples of questions and offers tips on the interview itself.

Why medical schools interview applicants

- interviews are another way to select the best students
- they assess the interpersonal skills that are important for medicine
- to verify and expand on what you have put in your UCAS application
- to give you the opportunity to decide on the right medical school for you

Interview procedures and formats

Interviews vary depending on the medical school, so find out as much as you can about what to expect. Ask at open days, and look at the medical school's prospectus or website. Interviews generally take place from November to late April. When you're invited for an interview bears no relation to how favourably your application is being considered.

Interview formats vary. For example:

- there may be a panel of around three people (perhaps a faculty member as chair and a student or junior doctor, and another doctor or health professional). Such interviews usually last for about 20 minutes
- you may have mini-interviews held at several stations with one or more interviewer at each. You could be asked particular types of questions at each station. If you attend an interview like this, find out what some of the themes for the stations are and what they might require. You can try to find this out from the medical school
- there could be a mixture of the above

Preparing for the interview

Preparation is essential to success. Think about the topics you could be asked about and what points you would make in response. Don't memorise stock answers because it will appear stilted and you may be caught out if the question isn't quite the same. You won't be able to anticipate all the questions, so don't be alarmed if you are asked the unexpected.

The interview may focus on what you've put in your personal statement. Read it through and be prepared to discuss anything you've mentioned. You may have to talk about your work experience or reading you have done, for example.

Be aware that you may be given scenario questions. You'll be asked how you would deal with different problems or situations or how you've coped with similar ones yourself.

- **Interview questions**

  Here is a selection of questions you may be asked and themes that might be explored. They are by no means exhaustive.

  - Questions about you, your reasons for wanting to be a doctor and how much you understand about the role
  - Questions about medicine
  - Questions about healthcare in the UK/ethical questions
  - Science questions
  - Your interests outside medicine

  Questions about you, your reasons for wanting to be a doctor and how much you understand about the role

  - why do you want to be a doctor rather than a different healthcare professional?
  - what was the most surprising aspect of your work shadowing?
  - what qualities do you think make a good doctor?
  - which areas of medicine particularly interest you and why?

  Questions about medicine

You can’t be expected to know the details, but you may be asked to discuss a topical or prevalent disease or health condition, such as diabetes, cancer or Ebola. It helps if you’re up to date with current affairs.

Questions about healthcare in the UK/ethical questions

In these cases, it’s advisable to explain both sides of the argument and then give your overall view. The General Medical Council’s Good medical practice guide [1] may help.

- what do you think about organisations outside the NHS providing NHS healthcare?
- what are the arguments for and against patients being cared for in the community?
- should non-essential surgery being available through NHS organisations?
- what are your views on euthanasia?
- what do you think of alternatives to medicine for the ‘treatment’ of cancer?
- what are the ethical issues concerned with abortion?
- should the NHS fund fertility treatment for people over 40?

Science questions

These will relate to your studies. You may be asked to discuss a science topic that particularly interests you or be asked a specific question, such as, Why do we find it harder to breathe at altitude? The list of possible questions is endless!

Your interests outside medicine

- what do you do to relax?
- how will any hobbies or interests you have help you in a career in medicine?
- what was the last book you read? Would you recommend it?
- who do you admire and why?

On the interview day

- many students are apprehensive about interviews, but take comfort in the fact that the interviewers must be impressed with your application so far
- first impressions count. Go into the interview room with a smile and the appearance of confidence. Sit up straight and try to relax
- let your personality and enthusiasm come through
- take a few seconds to think about your answer before responding to each question
- try to bring up any particular points you want to make, but only where appropriate
- if a question stumps you, don’t panic. Ask the interviewer to rephrase and answer as best you can. Don’t waffle
- you will probably be asked if you have questions of your own, eg about the structure of the course. If you can’t think of any, just say that everything’s been covered in the open day. Don’t ask questions for the sake of it
- at the end, thank the interviews for their time
- take the opportunity to talk with current students and other interviewees

After the interview

Immediately afterwards, try not to overanalyse your performance. If you're unsuccessful, think about how you could improve for any other interviews you may have.

Find out more

Our Career planning section [2]has more information on preparing for interviews in general.

- Succeed in Your Medical School Interview – published by Kogan Page (2015)
- Medical School Interviews – published by ISC Medical (2013)
- Succeeding in Your Medical School Interview – published by BPP Learning Media (2012)

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[1] http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/good_medical_practice.asp [2] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning