Gaining experience for medical school

This page gives an overview of the reasons why you need to gain experience before medical school and the main options available. There are also links to more detailed information where you can find out more.

Gaining experience for a career in health is important. It demonstrates that you’ve found out about the role you are interested in and have some understanding of what the work involves. This is particularly important before applying to medical school. Entry is extremely competitive and the training is long and demanding.

Medical schools expect applicants to have gained relevant experience. It will:

- help you decide whether medicine is the career for you
- give you something to mention in your UCAS personal statement [1] and to discuss at interviews
- demonstrate your commitment to medicine
- help you stand out from the competition
Any experience in healthcare is useful, but if at all possible you should try to have contact with patients and doctors and/or other healthcare professionals. Within reason, aim to get as much experience as you can. The more varied your experience, the better. You could combine a stint volunteering at a hospital with shadowing a GP, for example. This would give you a wider perspective on the different types of roles in medicine. The sooner you organise your experience, the more opportunities you will have.

**Listen to current medical students talking about gaining work experience.** [2]

- **How can I gain experience? Expand / Collapse**
  
  The main ways you might gain experience are through:

  - **work shadowing** [3]
  - **volunteering** [4]
  - **paid work** [5]

  However, there are other opportunities to find out more about medicine.

  - work experience placements in some areas of medicine are hard to come by because of the nature of the work and patient privacy, but a placement in a healthcare setting or anywhere where you deal with vulnerable people (eg with a charity) may give you the chance to find out about the work of healthcare professionals and will demonstrate your interest in people
  - if you’re involved in the care of a sick, disabled or older relative, this may bring you into contact with medics and other healthcare professionals
  - you could arrange to talk to a doctor about their role. Prepare a list of suitable questions about their training and career
  - if you are at school or college, ask whether it would be possible for a doctor to give a talk about their career, or for a medical school tutor to speak about what it takes to train as a doctor
  - reading the real life stories on this website will also give you an insight into what the work of a doctor involves
  - you could visit a medical museum

  There are a number of programmes to help aspiring medical students in gaining experience before medical school. Some of these are commercial ventures and you will be charged.

  **Find out more about work experience by reading our real-life stories from doctors.** [6]

  General tips on making the most of your experience can be found under **gaining experience** [7].

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**Source URL:** https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/applying-medical-school/gaining-experience-medical-school

**Links**