

Medicine application advice

About me

Most people would have given up when they heard the word 'UCAT', but well done if you are sat here reading this, determined to embark on the intense and stressful medicine application process. My name is Ellie and I applied for Medicine this academic year and was very fortunate to receive all offers from UEA, Exeter, Keele and Birmingham. I have chosen Keele as my firm and Exeter as my insurance, and I will hopefully begin at one of these universities in September 2021, following my gap year.

Whilst saying that you are applying to medicine is certainly an ego boost, it comes with its struggles as you are likely the only one to be applying to medicine in your school year; this was the case for me, which meant I had to find out most of the information myself and I didn't really have anyone that I could get advice from. Therefore, I want to create this help guide so that I can give you the advice that I wished I had at the beginning of my medicine application process. I hope this helps you! (:

Why do you want to study medicine?

If you want to study medicine because you think having 'Doctor' in front of your name would be cool, or you want to earn loads of money, then you are going into the wrong career! Being a doctor is one of the most stressful and intense careers in the world, so I am sure a nice paycheck won't make up for the painfully tiring shifts, the immense stress of the responsibility you carry and the disgusting body fluids you get covered in. So, make sure that you are choosing a career in medicine for the right reasons. For a lot of people, including myself, your ambition to become a doctor may have been catalysed by facing an illness or seeing a loved one go through an illness. But, it's okay if you don't have a life changing moment that you can attribute to your ambition to become a doctor - a lot of people just want to help others and enjoy the thought of saving people's lives.

Should I do anything in the holidays before year 12?

A BIG FAT NOTHING!!! Just enjoy yourself as you certainly won't be able to relax in the summer before year 13 with UCAT revision, personal statement writing and trying to revise AS knowledge. Besides, there isn't much you can do in the summer because most work experience placements don't start until October. However, one thing you could do is volunteer, because this looks great on your personal statement and it will keep you busy over the long break. And, if you really get bored (like I did) then you can begin preparing for your A levels by purchasing the 'Head-start to A levels' textbooks by CGP.

Work experience and volunteering

I found organising work experience one of the most frustrating parts of my medicine application process. It was a cycle of calling every department in the hospital - only to discover that none of them offered work experience - and sending loads of emails but never getting a response. Fortunately, my perseverance paid off because I ended up getting four different work experience placements, including two days shadowing a Cardiac Anaesthetist and having the privilege of watching open-heart surgery.

You don't need 4 different work experience placements, like me, but do ensure that you have at least 2 work experience placements plus one long-term volunteering placement (I volunteered at an old people's home for 6 months). It is imperative that you do work experience so that you can be certain that medicine is the right career choice for you, and it gives you lots to talk about in the interviews.

Don't leave organising work experience to the last minute!!! Hospitals are usually inundated with students requesting work experience, so you need to ensure that you start applying at the beginning of year 12. Most hospitals will start receiving applications from September for work experience placements, so ensure to go to your local hospital's website and apply promptly.

Most students are unable to get work experience in their local GP surgery due to confidentiality issues, so you need to be prepared to look further afield. My friend knew one of the doctors in a GP surgery a couple of towns over from me, so I wrote a letter to this particular doctor, handed it in to the GP surgery and the next day I got a text from her saying that I was welcome to shadow her for a day the following week. Whilst going through the official application processes via hospitals is good, you are more likely to get work experience if you contact doctors directly as they are usually very keen to help.

It's all about who you know! I personally have no friends or family members who are doctors, so I couldn't get work experience that way. However, make sure to talk to fellow medical applicants in your school year or the year above you as they may have some useful contacts. For instance, the boy in the year above me had a family-friend who was a Cardiac Anesthetist, so he kindly gave me his contact details and I arranged to shadow him in theatres for two days – it was AMAZING!

TOP TIPS FOR GETTING WORK EXPERIENCE:

- If you live in Northamptonshire, then visit the 'Northants GP' website where you can make an application to shadow a GP in your local area
- Ensure to apply for work experience at your local hospital in September/October of year 12 to give you the best chance of securing a placement.
- If you are concerned about travel expenses to your work experience placements, then talk to your Head of Sixth form as you may be eligible for a bursary.
- If you are looking to volunteer, then make sure you are DBS checked. You can do this or the organisation you are volunteering with may offer to do this for you.
- Be persistent! If you email somebody about work experience and they don't reply, then make sure to follow up the email. With hospitals so overrun, I found that my application to the work experience team got missed, so ensure to regularly follow it up and email them about the status of your application.
- Be charming! As a last resort, I decided to access the Hospital's consultant contact list and I chose ten different consultants to contact. I drafted a separate email for each consultant which was tailored to their area of expertise. I only received one response but that was from a Renal consultant, who seemed very pleased that I wrote in my email that 'the Kidney is my favourite organ'. Consultants and doctors are specialists in their area, so they are more willing to teach people who show a lot of enthusiasm for their specialty.

TOP TIPS FOR WHEN YOU ARE ON YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS:

Stepping into a work experience placement for the first time can be extremely daunting, because it is a completely new environment to you and the health professionals (without meaning to) can be quite intimidating. The first couple of days of my 5-day placement at a Brain Rehabilitation unit was awkward, because I felt quite useless and bothersome to the staff who were trying to get on with their jobs. Don't let this dishearten you, just try and get as involved as possible and make the most of your experience by asking questions.

- Sometimes the staff may (accidentally) forget about you. I found this happened a lot on the Brain Rehab unit, because they have so many patients to get up and dressed in the morning. But, instead of standing awkwardly in the corner waiting for someone to fetch you, don't be afraid to ask the nurses/HCAs if you can shadow them as they are usually more than happy to.
- Look after yourself! One of the days on my work experience I left feeling very ill and lethargic as I hadn't eaten all day, because I felt too awkward to ask for a lunch break. Don't do the same as you will end up feeling horrid and not make the most of your work experience. For most of my placements, there was a set lunchbreak, so it is likely that you will have time to eat.
- It is common sense but don't interfere with the doctor/nurse's job. For example, don't ask a question in the middle of a consultation, wait until afterwards.
- If you feel ill, don't go! We must remember that hospitals are full of vulnerable patients so if you have a cold or feel generally unwell, then don't go in as you may be a risk to the patients.
- If patients speak to you, then make conversation and have a chat. I found a lot of the patients on the ward were very intrigued by me and wanted to know more, so when there was free time, I always made time to talk to the patients.
- Keep a journal about your experiences. After each day of work experience, I would write in my journal about what I saw and what I learned. This benefitted me greatly when it came to writing my personal statement as it allowed me to write about experiences that I would have otherwise forgotten.
- If you are doing work experience in a specialised department, such as Respiratory or Renal, then it is good to watch documentaries or find information online about that area of medicine to give you a better idea of what you are likely to witness. Don't worry, you are not expected to know everything, but, for instance, when I did work experience at a Renal ward, I made sure to research the structure of the kidney and research into treatments, such as dialysis.

A levels

I studied A level Biology, Chemistry and Maths which is the pretty standard mix of A levels for medicine applicants. However, I know someone who got into medical school with Biology, Chemistry and Drama so don't feel obliged to choose Maths if you don't want to. Most medical schools require Chemistry, and some require Biology, so make sure to check the university's entry requirements before you apply.

Also, there is no benefit of taking 4 A levels as Medical Schools will only base your entry requirements on three of your A levels. Bear in mind that 4 A levels takes up a lot of time, time that you could be using to do volunteering, so only do 4 A levels if you really want to.

It is imperative to achieve good grades in year 12 so that your predicted grades are high enough to apply to medical school – poor predicted grades can cost you an interview offer, so make sure you work hard!

Extracurriculars

Whilst writing all about your work experience and amazing grades on a personal statement is good, it won't set you apart from the other candidates. But what does set you apart is relevant extracurricular activities. Extracurriculars are important to show the medical schools that you are an interesting person with interests and hobbies, not just a textbook regurgitating robot.

Whilst playing piano since you were two and growing plants in your nan's garden is good, you need to make your extracurriculars relevant to your ability to study medicine. For example, this is how I wrote about doing fundraising as a hobby:

"I am the Head of Fundraising at my school, which requires me to organise a Christmas gift collection to donate to the Children's Hospital, which involves leading a team, creating fundraising campaigns and having responsibility of utilising cash donations."

Whilst doing gardening is a good hobby, you have got to ensure that you clearly state any transferable skills that are relevant to your medical degree.

If you don't have any extracurriculars then find some! Medical schools want to take on well-rounded individuals who have more interests than just school and medicine, because having fun extracurriculars will help you strike a better work-life balance that is imperative for keeping a good mental wellbeing throughout your medical career.

Here are the main attributes that you want to think about when writing about extracurriculars on your personal statement:

- Team work
- Communication
- Leadership
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Responsibility

Should I do an EPQ?

At the end of year 12, I signed up to do an EPQ about the opioid epidemic as I thought it would really help my medicine application, but what I soon discovered from attending open days and talking to medical students is that the EPQ is a waste of time for medical applicants, and here's why:

- Medical schools will not alter your entry requirements if you achieve a certain grade in your EPQ.
- Unless you are planning to apply to oxbridge, then it will likely never come up in your interviews as most medical schools use an MMI interview format that would never have a whole station about the EPQ.

- A lot of medical schools don't even look at your personal statement so adding EPQ to your personal statement is not likely to give you any extra bonus points.
- From what my friends have said, doing an EPQ is quite stressful and time consuming, so you can refocus that time and energy into preparing for interviews and doing schoolwork instead.

However, if you still want to do an EPQ then that is fine. Whilst it may not benefit your medicine application, it can develop so many other skills that will prepare you for your medical degree, such as:

- Develop an interest in research.
- Learn how to collate information from different sources and bring it together in a structured format.
- Learning how to work independently.
- It could come up in an interview (most likely a panel/traditional interview), so it would give you something to talk about and would display your interest in medicine.
- Can develop your presentation and public speaking skills, which is necessary for medical school.

Personal statement

When I handed in the first draft of my personal statement, my Head of Sixth Form basically ripped it up because it was that bad, so don't expect to write a perfect personal statement in just one draft. In the end, it took me 14 drafts to write a personal statement that I was happy with.

General tips for writing a personal statement

- Give yourself plenty of time to write it; I gave myself the whole summer holidays. Don't leave it until you go back to school in September, because the first month of year 13 can be quite stressful and intense, so you wouldn't be giving yourself the best opportunity to write a personal statement that you love.
- If you write a draft, leave it a few days before you look at it again, this way you can more easily identify mistakes and bits that you don't like.
- Don't let too many people read your personal statement as too many conflicting opinions can be really confusing. So, I recommend only allowing a teacher to read it and then a close friend/family member – that's it!
- Don't read too many examples online! I read a couple example personal statements online to get an idea of what I had to write and what structure to use, but don't read too many because you may accidentally plagiarise your personal statement. If you do read an example, leave a couple days before writing your personal statement.
- Make a good plan! List your strengths, work experiences, roles, responsibilities and interests. Then, you can make little points about how each one gives you skills that will benefit your medical degree and formulate these into well-structured paragraphs.
- When you first write your personal statement, don't worry about the character limit, just write about what you want to say then you can work from there on how to cut it down or add more to satisfy the character limit.

Introduction

It's important to write an impressive and engaging introduction to give the reader a sense of who you are as a person and why you want to study medicine. The introduction was the last thing I wrote, because I think it is a lot easier to write once you have the main bulk of the personal statement written. I think a good way to start the personal statement is by talking about why you want to study medicine. You could write about a personal experience that you went through, or you can talk about your personal traits and how they are suited for a medical career. Every person's reason to study medicine is different, so make your introduction personal to you.

Work experience

I found writing about work experience quite tough as it was hard for me to articulate what I learned from my different experiences in a concise and meaningful manner, without falling into the trap of telling a story. It is really important that, rather than listing your experiences, you REFLECT on what you learned. The general structure I followed for writing work experience paragraphs was:

1. State what you did, e.g. *"Observing open heart surgery was remarkable."* (* these quotes are taken from my personal statement, so don't copy them as it will be detected by plagiarism software).
2. Write about what you saw and what you learned from it, e.g. *"Even when the patient was placed on bypass and the cardiac muscle ceased, the surgeon's precision was not impaired, emphasising that remaining calm under pressure is paramount."*
3. Conclude the paragraph with a statement about why your experience makes you more motivated to study medicine, e.g. *"It makes me enthused to work in an environment where we can join our different areas of expertise with the common goal of providing excellent healthcare."*

Make sure you do not lie on your personal statement about the work experience you did, because if they were to ask you about it in the interviews and you could not give them an honest answer, then you would definitely not be given an offer. Also, don't exaggerate about what you have done on work experience. I heard a story of a medical applicant who said in his interview that he assisted a surgeon in surgical theatres in Pakistan, which of course is illegal as the boy was not medically trained, so the university had to call the police and report the matter.

Interest in medicine

You may have the right skills to pursue a career in medicine, but the medical schools want to see that you are actually interested in medicine as an academic subject. Writing about medical interest in your personal statement could include:

- If you have done independent research (e.g. an EPQ) on a topic in medicine, then you could write about that as it shows your willingness to do independent research on areas of medicine that you are passionate about.
- Talk about medical books that you have read and what they taught you. One of my friends wrote about Adam Kay's book called 'This is going to hurt', and described how the book made her aware of the challenges doctors face in medicine, but she turned it into a positive by describing how she is a motivated individual who likes to overcome challenges. This is really

good as medical schools want to identify students who are aware of the challenges of being a doctor and have the resilience to overcome these challenges.

- You could also describe something interesting you witnessed on your work experience and then talk about further research you did about it, such as reading medical journals and listening to podcasts about the topic.

Hobbies and outside interests

As I said before in the 'Extracurriculars' section, you need to ensure that you choose to talk about interests and hobbies that display relevant skills that would benefit your medical degree, such as leadership, teamwork, empathy, etc. Also, a medical degree is stressful so the medical admission tutors want to see that you can find a way to relax and that you will not burn out under the pressure of the degree.

Deferred entry

If you wish to take a gap year, like me, then you will have to apply for a deferred entry. I recommend writing a sentence or two about what you plan to do on your gap year. The medical admissions tutor wants to see that you are doing productive things in your gap year that will benefit your medical degree.

"In my gap year, I plan to focus on rebuilding my strength and fitness, which was affected by my cancer treatment. Moreover, I want to work as a Care assistant and travel abroad, which will allow me to develop greater independence and decision-making skills, that will help me become an excellent doctor."

Conclusion

Write a conclusion that draws together everything you have written about and leaves the medical admissions tutor with a lasting impression about your ability to study medicine. I personally made my conclusion patient-focused by stating particular traits that would make me an excellent doctor and how I am excited to use these traits to help my future patients. Just avoid repeating what you said in your introduction in your conclusion, try and think of a new point to add as every sentence counts!

Other things to consider

- Check that all your grammar is correct.
- If your character count is over the limit, then start first by removing words that are not necessary and will not affect the meaning of your sentence. And, if you are over the character limit by a considerable amount, then prioritise your points and consider removing a point to make up space.
- If you get asked about aspects of your personal statement in your interview, are you willing to elaborate and justify everything you have written? For instance, if you talk about a medical book you read, then think about questions that the interviewer could ask you about it and test if you could answer them. If you can't, then remove it from your personal statement.
- If you write about volunteering, then indicate a time scale. Medical schools LOVE displays of long-term commitment, so if you have been volunteering at an old people's home for over a year then make sure to write it in your personal statement.

- Your character count is limited so ensure that every sentence on your personal statement is meaningful, by this I mean that it tells the reader something about you, or about something you have learned.
- You need to demonstrate that you know that a career in medicine is stressful and challenging, this will show the admissions tutor that you appreciate the reality of being a doctor and are well-informed about the challenges ahead.
- Your personal statement does not need to be a piece of art. When I got English teachers to read my personal statement, they would criticise the fact that it didn't flow very well as the paragraphs were not linked to one another. Whilst it is good if you can make it flow, don't worry about it as the admissions tutors are assessing the content, not your ability to write a cohesive essay.

UCAT

The UCAT was undoubtedly my least favourite part of the medical application process. At first the UCAT test looks extremely daunting and completely irrelevant (especially abstract reasoning), so if you feel apprehensive or demotivated, then that's okay. But it is really important that you practice as a good UCAT score is your golden ticket into the medical school interviews. My scores were:

Verbal reasoning: 600

Decision Making: 630

Quantitative reasoning: 660

Abstract reasoning: 710

Situational Judgement: band 2

Total score: 2600

A score of 2500 and above is usually adequate for most medical schools but do check on the university's website about their UCAT requirements.

Verbal reasoning

I am not sure if I am very qualified to give you advice on this section, seeing as I only got a score of 600, but I am sure my score would have been a lot worse without some strategies I picked up along the way, these are:

- Do not read the text first! Read the questions first then use keywords in the questions to try and find the answers in the text.
- Don't rush but don't go too slow either. You should have around 11 minutes remaining by question 20.
- For the inference questions 'GUESS-FLAG-SKIP', these take very long to answer so you are better off coming back to them at the end.
- Always select an answer, even if it is a blind guess.
- Learn to speed read and identify important keywords, such as dates, names, antonyms, etc.
- When an SBA set says "most likely true..." this is the answer that is either true or can't tell.

- If you think that the first answer is correct, decide and discard - don't bother reading through all of the answers.
- Don't panic! If you can't find an answer in the text, just 'GUESS-FLAG-SKIP'.

Decision Making

Decision making is definitely not as straightforward as it looks, because it requires a lot of data interpretation which can be hard to do when you are strapped for time.

- Use the whiteboard provided to keep track of information.
- GUESS-FLAG-SKIP complicated Venn diagrams or multiple statement questions.
- When doing data interpretation questions, always look at the data first (read axes, title, etc) to give yourself a clear idea of what the data shows. And, when evaluating conclusions from graphs, start with the easiest conclusion first.
- Make sure you know how to work out probabilities (AND/OR rule).

Quantitative reasoning

You may think you are good at maths but when you have to do it under timed conditions, it's a whole different story!

- Try and use the calculator as little as possible, use mental maths where you can. Ensure that you know your times tables, squared numbers (up to 15), cubed number (up to 10), and your fraction/decimals equivalents off by heart.
- Half-way marker: should have 16 mins left by question 17.
- If a question looks difficult, GUESS-FLAG-SKIP and leave it until the end.
- You can use estimation if answer choices are very spread out.
- Topics that could come up: geometry, speed-distance-time, percentages, ratio, conversions, probability and tables/diagrams.

Abstract reasoning

I absolutely DETESTED abstract reasoning, because it felt so pointless and I always got a terrible score. I didn't want AR to bring me down, so I revised this topic the most and I somehow managed to get my top score in this section.

Use the table below to help you identify patterns in a methodical manner:

Category (SSSPN)	Basic Patterns
Shape	Common types (square, triangle, etc) Common sides <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Straight/curved – Convex/concave – Regular/irregular Common angles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Acute/obtuse Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Symmetrical/asymmetrical
Size	Common size

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Big/small – Specific shapes (e.g. square is always small) <p>Relative size between shapes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Particular shape always larger than another
Shade	<p>Common shade (black/white/shaded/pattern)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All shapes one shade – Shape-specific (certain shapes shaded)
Position	<p>Shape in set area in box</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Top/bottom/left/right <p>Relatively positioned</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Between shapes (rotational sequence, e.g. clockwise) <p>Direction of arrows</p>
Number	<p>Number of shapes characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Total shapes – Certain shapes – Number of sides – Other (angles, enclosed areas/intersections) <p>Number characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Odd/even/multiples of 3/primes

Approach:

1. Glance for obvious patterns
2. If you can't see a pattern straight away, then compare the two simplest and most similar boxes using SSSPN
3. Confirm in other boxes
4. Apply the pattern to the test shapes

TIPS:

- DO NOT PANIC! If you cannot find a pattern using SSSPN, then GUESS-FLAG-SKIP.
- Watch out for dependent patterns as they are the hardest to spot, e.g. if there is a triangle in a box, there is always an arrow pointing towards it, or black shapes have an even number of sides.
- Don't start counting the shapes straight away, look for the simplest patterns first.
- Make sure you know angle values in regular shapes such as: triangles, squares, pentagon, hexagon, heptagon octagon, decagon.
- Make sure you know the number of sides in irregular shapes such as: 5-point star, arrows and a lightning strike.
- Keep track of the patterns you come across in a word document and assign into categories: 'Easy'/'Medium'/'Hard', and make sure to read this document every day. Or, what I found was

really useful was drawing out the patterns as it allowed me to remember the patterns better, so that I could identify the patterns more easily.

Easy	Medium	Hard
<p>A - Every white triangle has a black circle.</p> <p>B - Every white circle has a white triangle.</p> <p>A – black dots sits where all 3 shapes overlap</p> <p>B – white dot sits where all 3 shapes overlap</p> <p>A – four points of overlap</p> <p>B – six points of overlap</p> <p>A – 3 enclosed areas</p> <p>B – 2 enclosed areas</p> <p>A – even number of shapes.</p> <p>More white than black</p> <p>B – odd number of shapes. All black</p> <p>A – $\frac{3}{4}$ shapes overlap. Shape that does not overlap is same shape as middle overlapping shape.</p> <p>A – three of the same shapes are collinear</p> <p>B – three of the same shape forms an equilateral triangle</p>	<p>A – filled shapes aligned to one plane of the box</p> <p>B – straight-lined shapes can be joined on an imaginary straight line</p> <p>A – no enclosed areas. One digit</p> <p>B- enclosed areas. One digit.</p> <p>A – number of points on star equals number of circles</p> <p>B – number of points on star equals number of triangles</p> <p>A – big triangles has a circle near its vertices</p> <p>B – big quadrilaterals has a triangle near its vertices</p> <p>A- three circles + one triangle and a square in the lower half</p> <p>B – Five circles + one triangle and a square in the upper half</p> <p>A – if shapes overlap, star is in RHC</p> <p>B – if shapes overlap, star in LHC</p>	<p>A - Lightning bolt to the left, big shape is shaded black. Lightning bolt to the right, big shape shaded grey.</p> <p>B - Set A dots are equidistant from the cross and set B dots are not equidistant from the cross.</p> <p>A – sum of angles equals 540</p> <p>B – sum of angles equals 720</p> <p>A – rotation of a portion of the shape results in a regular shape</p> <p>B – addition of two straight lines results in a regular shape</p> <p>A – black shapes are on top and even number of shapes in box</p> <p>B – white shapes are on top and prime number of shapes in box</p> <p>A – dashed circles in corners.</p> <p>Number of sides on big shape is 4 plus number of circles.</p> <p>B – dashed circles on the side.</p> <p>Number of sides on big shapes 2 plus number of dashed circles.</p>

Situational judgement

The main themes that this section is trying to evaluate is common sense, putting patients first, integrity, dignity, respect, professionalism and team working.

- Ensure that the answer you choose relays the key themes above.
- If you don't know then choose the extreme answers, as most answers to the questions are extreme ('very important') rather than the intermediates ('important').
- Read 'Good Medical Practice' by the GMC as it gives detailed advice on how doctors should behave.
- If you get a situational judgement question completely wrong, then make a note of it on a word document so that you can come back and read it to ensure that you do not make the same mistake again.

General tips

- I would recommend giving yourself 4-6 weeks to prepare for the UCAT and practice for 2-3 hours each day. Whilst you can't exactly revise for the UCAT, practicing is imperative to better prepare you for the exam.
- Purchase a Medify subscription. It is fairly pricey, but it is worth every penny. Medify is the closest replica to the actual test and houses thousands of practice questions and mock tests.

- Go to a UCAT crash course. Feeling the most insecure about the UCAT part of my medical application, I decided to attend a UCAT course to learn better strategies for how to revise. I personally went to the 6Med course and it was fantastic, I learned so much and it really helped me revise better for the UCAT test. These courses are quite expensive, however some medical schools host UCAT courses for free, so research if there are any free courses in your area.
- Revise two sections each day.
- On test day, try to keep calm and if you do badly on one section try and forget about it in the next section. If you start to feel panicky or stressed, then take a moment to breathe and calm down.
- Before your test begins, ask for multiple whiteboards so you don't have to keep putting up your hand and asking for them in the exam.
- In the time between sections, use this to write down any key notes (such as conversions or fractions/decimals) and just relax before the next section begins.
- Before your test, make sure to go to the toilet as no breaks are allowed during the exam.
- A bad UCAT score is not the end of the world. It may mean that you can't apply to the university you wanted, but make sure to research into Universities (such as Cardiff) that don't weight their application process on the UCAT, instead they base their application process on GCSEs and personal statement. Apply to the universities that have a selection process more suited to your strengths, giving you a greater chance of getting an interview.
- Make sure to go on Youtube and watch videos of people explaining how to solve UCAT questions, I recommend 'Kharma Medic'.

BMAT

Unfortunately, I cannot give advice on the BMAT as I decided not to take it as, quite frankly, I didn't want to go through another admissions test. But, good on you if you are taking on the BMAT as well – lots of people say it is easier than the UCAT. Useful websites:

<https://www.themedicportal.com/blog/6-bmat-preparation-tips-score-highly/>

<https://www.kaptest.co.uk/blog/uk-medical/whats-best-way-approach-biomedical-admissions-test>

Choosing universities

I found choosing 4 universities quite difficult as they are all so good, but what helped me choose were these factors:

- Do they offer cadaveric dissection? Cadaveric dissection is only available at a handful of medical schools, so make sure you do your research if it is something you want to do.
- Location. You are going to be stuck at the place for 5 years, so it is important that you enjoy living there. Make sure to attend open days to get a better feel for the place.
- Do they use Problem-based learning? (I recommend signing up to a PBL session on an open day to see if you will enjoy learning in this way).
- Check the UCAT requirements of the university to ensure that yours is high enough to be considered for an interview.
- Some of the medical schools require A level Biology but others don't, so check that you can apply to the University with your A level subjects.

- When do they start clinical placements? A lot of medical schools now do clinical placements from the first year, however some (such as oxbridge) do not until third year. The benefit with starting clinical placements earlier is that you can learn in a more hands-on approach, but if you prefer to learn from textbooks and lectures then this approach may not be right for you.

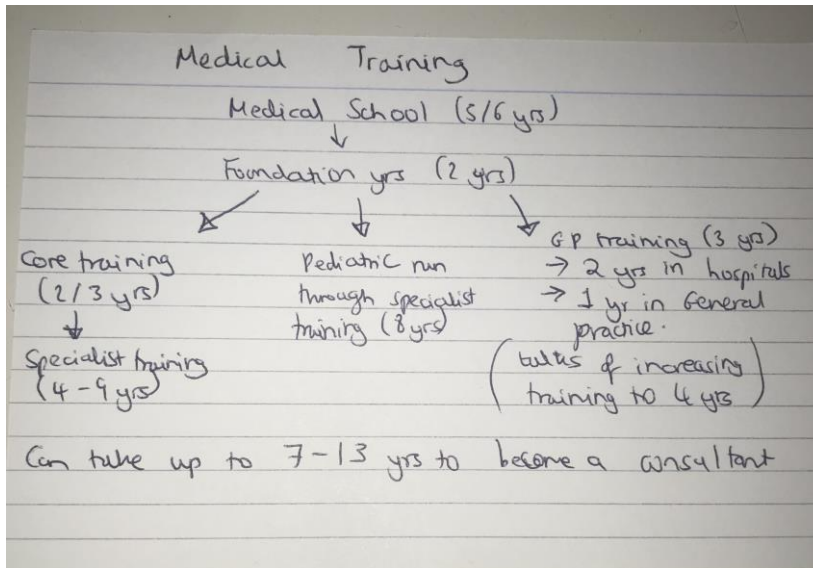
Interviews

I received all 4 interview invitations, and all were MMI. For the most part, I enjoyed the interviews and they went by so quickly but do be prepared for some difficult questions. It is a nerve-wracking experience but remember that you have received an invitation because the university wants to know more about you, so be confident in yourself and be proud of what you have achieved. Also, remember that you have probably beat 8 applicants to get an interview, so now you only have to beat 1 or 2 applicants to get an offer.

How to prepare for the interviews:

- I went through Medic Portal's most common interview questions and made mind maps on as many as I could (will insert pictures below). I found this really useful as when it came to practice answering the questions, I could look at my mind maps afterwards and identify points that I had missed.
- I also made mind maps of each of my work experience placements, where I wrote about what I saw and what I learned. It allowed me to store all the relevant information in one place, so that I could see clearly points that I had missed when I was practicing.
- Make knowledge flashcards. The medical schools won't expect you to know the human anatomy or how the NHS runs, but it is a good idea to get clued up on certain topics, such as how Brexit affects health care, the Junior Doctor Contract, the different levels of care in the NHS (primary, secondary, etc) and learn the pros and cons of privatising the NHS, etc.
- Read the news! I got asked on my interviews "What interesting medical news have you read recently?", so make sure you keep up to date with current affairs and prepare an answer for this question nearer to your interview date. Also, on one of my interviews I was asked "Can you give an example of medical negligence that you have read in the news?", so make sure you don't just read news about medical research, also read about the NHS and patient stories.
- Do mock interviews. These can be with family members, friends, teachers or even your GP (just write them a letter and they should be happy to help). The more practice you can do, the better.
- I didn't bother attending an MMI course, but if you don't feel confident about the interviews, then going on a course could be a good way to prepare.
- I recommend purchasing a medical school interviews book as they tend to have good example answers in there, especially for the ethics questions that can be tricky to answer.
- Make sure that you can talk about your work experience. Don't just state what you did, describe what you learned and how you can implement those skills into your own medical career.
- Ensure to go to the University's website and go to their medicine interviews page as they give more information about the interview and what to expect.
- Learn how to answer questions in a concise manner. My Exeter interview was 3 questions in 3 minutes, so I had to ensure that I could answer a question in a short amount of time, whilst

getting all of my points across. For instance, if they ask you about your work experience, then avoid telling a story as this wastes time, instead talk about what you learned.



- Privatisation of the NHS FOR + AGAINST
- For
- NHS is non-profit so subsidiary care (Mid staffs)
 - Take on simple high volume work (done without interference from emergencies).
- Against
- Fragmentation of care so patients have to travel more and issues with patient notes.
 - Training issues. Private companies may not want to train doctors as it results in profit loss.
 - Conflict of interest. External providers partially owned by doctors, leads to competition and financial gain.

TALKING TO PEOPLE WITH SPEECH DIFFICULTIES

- It can be difficult as you fear that you won't understand one another properly.
Do NOT define patient by their disability. Make the extra time and effort to communicate.

DO THINGS ON THE PATIENT'S TERMS.

Always check and gain consent from patient before moving, washing them.
Always ask their opinion, rather than giving orders.

DO BE RESPECTFUL

Example: Podiatrist suggested increasing anti-depressants. Patient refused and conversation went in circles. It was evident that the patient had a low mood and felt very demotivated.

The exasperated doctor laughed when she the patient continued to resist.
NOT APPROPRIATE because he insinuated that the patient was being 'difficult' and 'immature', makes patient feel humiliated and under-valued.

Doctor should have respected her decision and approached the conversation again at a later date, causing less distress.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Exp

The ward sister announced at handover about a new routine for the week. When she left, the nurses were complaining about it. As a result, they became agitated and there was low morale. could have been avoided if the nurses voiced their doubts to the ward sister. communication is vital for effective teamwork.

WORK EXPERIENCE AT A BRAIN REHAB UNIT

HELP PATIENT TO UNDERSTAND THEIR ILLNESS

Helps patient visualise their ailment and be more engaged to take part in their treatment.

BE POSITIVE

Reassurance and hope is everything.
Be positive and set goals with patient to make them more motivated to get better.

Example: Parkinson's patient who found hope from first physio session.

PRESSURE ON DRs to discharge
Most patients did not require rehab. However, pressure for docs to discharge patients from hospital means that they end up in rehab units.

ETHICS

A lady with advanced MS was given a rehab bed.
Technically, the lady shouldn't be on a rehab unit because she is going to be so progressive. However, being so young, the staff decided to give her a bed as a firm of hope. Ethically, they felt this was the right decision.

DEALING WITH FAMILY

Important for doctors to offer to liaise with patient's family, to take pressure off the patient and give full involvement. Provide clarity and builds a relationship, hence the patient gets worse.

BE PERSONABLE

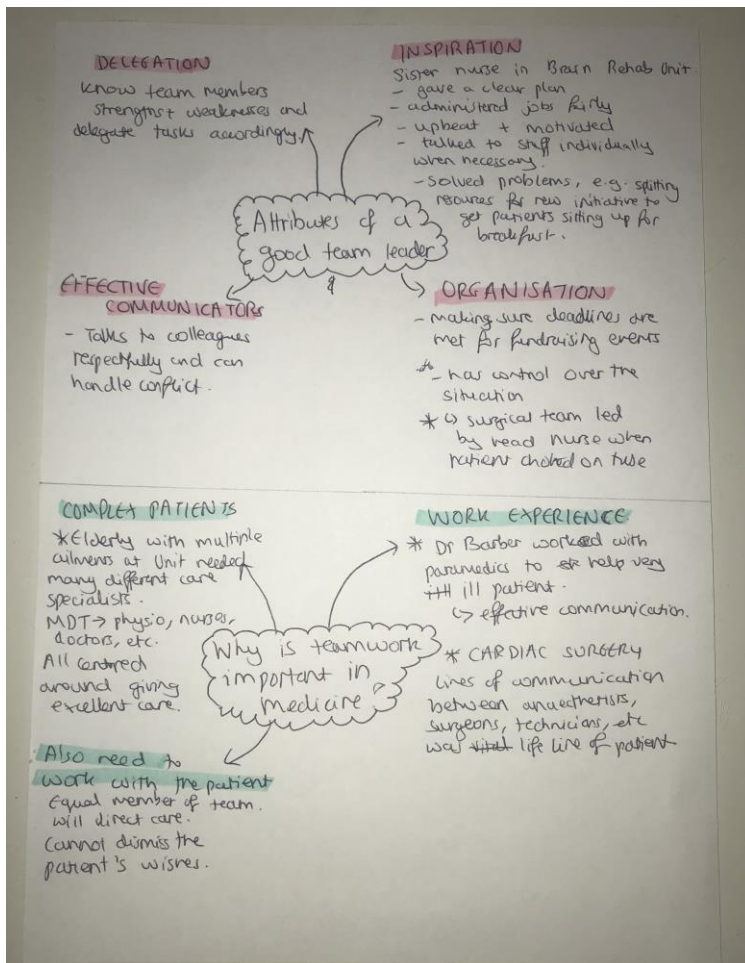
Ask patient how they are doing, and about their personal life or interests.
Less clinical => build trust.

COOPERATION OF SERVICES IS SLOW

MDT team constantly said that they were waiting for a referral. Services so stretched that effective cooperation is virtually impossible.
-> worse patient care.

STRAINED SOCIAL SERVICES

Patients in unit way past discharge date, as a result of limited social housing and few carers available.
Takes time + money to install equipment. Less beds going to people who need them.



Interview day

- Make sure you leave plenty of time to travel so that you do not miss your interview. If the University is far away, then book a hotel the night before.
- It is a good idea to bring some notes for your travel to the University, but don't try and learn information (facts) on the day of your interview as you likely won't be able to remember it which will stress you out further.
- Take a loved one with you for morale support. Or, if you would prefer, then go by yourself.
- Arrive at the medical school in plenty of time to register and hand in your documents.
- Talk to the fellow applicants! Most applicants are as nervous as you are, so make the effort to talk to them as it will calm you down. My favourite part of my Keele interview was chatting to the fellow applicants in the waiting area because we shared funny stories, which helped calm my nerves before the interview.
- FLEX HARD! The reason you have been invited to interview is because the medical school finds you interesting and wants to get to know you, so be confident and proud of what you have achieved. Ensure to drop in all the experiences and accomplishments you have in your interview – you literally have nothing to lose, so show yourself off (just don't cross the line of being arrogant).

- When you go to each interview station, try to forget about the one prior as it will just put you off. Think of each station as a clean slate.
- Role plays seem daunting and unnatural at first, but they are usually everyone's favourite station, because it is usually just a nice chat with an actor. However, do be prepared for some more serious role plays: in one of mine, the actor started crying and I had to console him, so try to act as natural and compassionate as possible.
- Most interviewers have a very good poker face. If the interviewer doesn't smile, then it may make you feel like what you are saying is boring or incorrect but try and look past this and be confident in your answer. Interviewers are told to keep neutral so don't try and judge your response based on their facial expressions.
- You can ask the interviewer to repeat a question AND you can take a few moments to think about an answer, but don't take too long as it may be quite awkward.
- If you finish what you have to say before time runs out, then you can just sit in silence. However, if you do have something else relevant to say, then say it – just make sure you don't repeat yourself and ramble.
- Use the time between stations wisely. Take a moment to relax after your previous station, but then make sure to read the information in front of you and begin modelling a response in your head.
- Maths stations may feel quite daunting but if you go slow and steady, making sure not to rush any of the calculations, then you should be fine.
- If you have a data interpretation station, then take your time when reading it so you can fully understand it. If there are graphs, then ensure to read the axes and title so you know what the data represents. When answering questions about the data, don't be afraid to look over the data again – it's better than saying the wrong thing!
- If you lose track of what you are saying or don't know the answer to a question, don't panic, just be honest. In this situation, you can tell the interviewer that you don't understand the question or have forgotten what you were going to say. It may be awkward for you, but the interviewer appreciates that you are only human, so you are more likely to slip up in this high-pressure situation.
- When talking about your qualities and experiences, always relate these to your medical career and how it will make you a good doctor. E.g. *"Doing work experience at a Brain Rehabilitation Unit has taught me how to communicate effectively with people who have speech problems, so this will help me communicate with a diverse range of patients, with different verbal capabilities and mental capacities, when I am a doctor."*
- Be smiley and friendly. When you walk into a station, introduce yourself and smile!
- On ethics stations, such as talking about abortion, always give an evenly weighted argument by discussing both for and against points. You can express your opinion about an ethical scenario or topic, but do not give a one-sided argument as it makes you look like you only consider your point of view.
- On ethics stations, refer to the 4 pillars of medical ethics: non-maleficence, beneficence, justice and autonomy.

After your interviews, relax and eat some food! Try to forget about the possible mistakes you made as this will just drive you crazy and give you nightmares. If you prepared to the best of your ability, then

there was nothing more that you could do. It is an anxious wait for offers but try and keep yourself distracted.

What do I do if I get rejected?

In this situation, you have two choices: choose your 5th choice (if you have one) or take a gap year and reapply. I know the thought of doing the UCAT again is too much to bear, but if Medicine is your dream career then it will be worth it. Plus, you will not be discriminated by medical schools due to the fact that you are a reapplicant, instead they will be impressed by your dedication to go through this horrible process again!

Reapplying in a gap year

First, you need to determine why you were unsuccessful the first time round and fix it. If they offer it, then ask your university for feedback so you can identify the reasons that you were unsuccessful. If it was a bad UCAT score, then practice more to do better. If it was a lack of work experience, then use your gap year to get more medical experience, such as working as an HCA in a hospital. If it was poor interview skills, then consider going on an interview course. These are all things that can be fixed, so it is just up to you to stay motivated and put in the hard work, so that you can strive towards your dream career as a doctor.

Final notes

If you have got to the end of this document, then well done! It is a tough process, but I hope my advice has made it slightly easier. I wish you all the best of luck and I hope you get the offers that you deserve. Remember to have confidence in yourself and, if you feel demotivated, then readjust your focus and think of the amount of people you will help when you are a doctor. It's hard work but it will be so worth it.

I am planning on creating a Youtube channel with videos on it about how to apply to medicine, so look out for 'Ellie Waters' on Youtube for more advice.

If you have any questions, then feel free to contact me via email to elliew373@gmail.com