

## **The Medical CV: Getting it Right**

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The preparation of one's CV is an essential task when applying for a medical post. It is important for many reasons. It will determine whether the individual doctor will be short-listed for interview. At the interview its content will inform the selection panel about one's strengths and suitability. The importance of the CV is accentuated when applying for overseas fellowships as it only means by which applicant is being assessed. It takes longer than one might think to set out a good CV. It is important to start preparing it well before the closing date for applications<sup>1</sup>.

The number of interviews that present-day medical trainees attend is significantly less than doctors of previous generations. Many senior doctors will recall going to interviews every 6 months as they moved from job to job. In the past this was necessary because one had to organize one's own rotations. The advent of training schemes means that NCHDs are faced with only one or two interviews ie at the start of BST and HST schemes. In some run-through schemes there is just one interview at the point of entry such as in anaesthesia and general practice.

The current postgraduate structures increase the importance of the interview because it determines whether the doctor gets a place on a training scheme. The interviews are held only once annually. Those who are unsuccessful have to wait for one year before applying again. Working outside a postgraduate scheme is not recognized as training. In essence one's career is placed on hold. It is imperative that applicants to training schemes give it their best shot.

The CV is a summary of one's education, training, qualifications, skills, achievements and work experience. It should be laid out in a standardized format. Selection panels are conservative by nature. Interviewers prefer a recognized approach.

Ensure that all addresses, phone numbers and email details are up to date. Not infrequently the times and dates of interviews have to be changed at short notice. Although initially unsuccessful, a position may arise when someone does not take up his offer. If one can't be contacted, one may miss out.

Those entering training programmes at BST level, should place an emphasis on their undergraduate years. Any honours obtained will be noted and awarded additional marks. At this stage after receiving one's medical degree, details about school and the leaving certificate results are less relevant and should be minimized. In order to provide further guidance, it is planned that into the future the interview marking system will be published.

The start date and completion date of all previous posts must be clearly set out. There mustn't be any gaps. They will be noted by the interview committee. They create a bad impression. Even short periods of unemployment should be fully explained. Provide an explanation for any absences. Continuity and consistency are highly valued characteristics in both trainee doctors and those applying for consultant posts.

The CV should be tailored to the post or scheme that is being applied for. Experience and level of interest should be highlighted. Any student electives in the specialty should be included and some narrative provided around what was gained from the experience. This type of activity supports the assertion that the doctor is committed to the specialty that he has chosen.

General suitability is one of the criteria used by most selection committees. While somewhat vague and difficult to define, it carries a heavy weighting. It is about whether the committee believe that the doctor will be able to fulfil the post competently. It is whether the applicant has the necessary skill sets to complete the training programme. It encompasses the broader attributes. A suitable doctor is someone who is approachable and helpful. It is someone who is caring and communicates effectively with his patients. It is someone who gets on well with his colleagues. It is someone who is flexible and generous with his time.

These qualities can be difficult to illustrate on a written CV. One approach is to give the reader a flavor of one's working day. For example 'in my last job I learned the importance of visiting the wards first thing in the morning to check on any overnight events and find out from nursing what patients need their care prioritized. I understand the importance of discharge planning including medications, OPD appointments, and what to do in the event of a future relapse or complication.

Clinical acumen is another quality that is tested at the interview. It concentrates on one's diagnostic and management. It relates to one's ability to identify a clinical deterioration and how to escalate care. At the interview candidates are frequently about a case that went well or perhaps a case where things could have been done differently. It is helpful to have outlines of one or two examples prepared in advance. However, be mindful of confidentiality.

Research and publications are dependent on the stage of one's career. At BST level the academic activity mostly relates to quality improvement projects and audits. The committee will be looking mainly at one's ability to commence and complete a small project. Presentation and/or publication of the work is important. Enrolment in a statistics or research writing course always impresses.

Those at SpR level will be expected to have a more substantial body of research by time they apply for a consultant post. At this point some candidates will have obtained a higher degree.

Candidates will vary in their aptitude and interest in research. There are 3 categories. There are those whose primary interest is in clinical care. There is a second group with a special interest in clinical research. The third, least common group, are interested in the development of basic science. Large tertiary centres find that a combination of all 3 categories fosters the optimal synergy.

Research experience to some extent is expected in all candidates for senior posts. If one has no experience in research, it would be difficult to guide and advise trainees in their projects.

The CV should contain a section on one's teaching experience. Doctors have a role in both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and training. The candidate should explain his part in his hospital, department, or practice's in education. Teaching is important because of the continual turnover in healthcare staff and one's own personal development.

Many commentators are cautious about the insertion of a personal statement. It should not be too personal as it may back one into niche position<sup>2</sup>. Its important not to make any claims that cannot be lived up to at the interview. Ensure that referees are contacted and their permission sought about their inclusion on one's CV.

Finally, when the CV has been prepared ask a senior colleague to review it and offer a critique.

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Editor

#### **References:**

1. Rimmer A. How can I polish my CV? BMJ 2019;366:14903
2. Oxtoby K. Tips on preparing your CV. BMJ 2019;366:14875