PUPIL GUIDE

Work experience in general practice

Inspiring and preparing tomorrow's doctors
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Welcome

This brief guide has been created by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) to help pupils prepare for a work experience placement in general practice; ensuring they know both what to expect and what is expected of them.

If you are thinking about a career in healthcare, work experience in the NHS offers the chance to see what the job is really like. It may confirm your career choice or open your eyes to other options that you hadn’t considered. Your time spent on work experience in general practice should provide you with examples of teamwork and other core skills and attributes required to work in healthcare.

What is work experience?

Work experience is any activity or life experience that helps you prepare for medical school. This means any activity that allows you to demonstrate:

- That you have had people-focused experience of providing a service, care or help to others and that applicants understand the realities of working in a caring profession.
- That you have developed some of the values, attitudes and behaviours essential to be a doctor such as conscientiousness, good communication skills, and the ability to interact with a wide variety of people. The values that medical schools are looking for are set out in the NHS Constitution and explained in the MSC’s statement on the core values and attributes needed to study medicine.
- That you have a realistic understanding of medicine and the physical, organisational and emotional demands of a medical career.


Therefore, work experience can include - shadowing healthcare professionals in a GP practice or in a secondary care setting like a hospital; volunteering at a care home or undertaking relevant part-time work.

Reflection is essential

Work experience is one way that applicants can obtain a realistic understanding of medicine. The focus, is not how much work experience a pupil undertakes but how they reflect upon it. We recommend that all pupils download a copy of the RCGP reflective diary to assist you during your placement (available at: rcgp.org.uk/discovergp)
What should you do ahead of your placement?

✓ Be sure that you know the dates, start and end times, and who to report to on your first day.
✓ Look up your journey to the practice and plan your travel options, you may wish to do a run through ahead of time.
✓ Insert the contact name & number in your phone in case you experience travel delays.
✓ Look up the practice website, how many GPs work at the practice? What other health professionals work at the practice? How many registered patients does it have? What services does it provide?
✓ Download the RCGP reflective diary (rcgp.org.uk/discovergp) and complete the ‘pre-experience’ activities at the front.
✓ Inform the practice as soon as possible if you are unable to attend as they will have made special arrangements for you.

What to wear

All pupils are expected to wear smart clothes, this means no jeans. It is advised to wear closed toed comfortable shoes, no trainers or sandals. Shirts/tops which allow you to roll up the sleeves are advised due to infection control. It is best not to wear a lot of make-up, perfume/after shave and minimal jewellery. If you are unsure of what is appropriate ask the GP practice.

How to be the best work experience participant

✓ The practice has given up their time to have you with them, whether that be for one day or three. Be sure to thank them!
✓ GP practices are extremely busy places; staff have a lot of responsibilities and won’t have time to stop and discuss everything with you. Where possible, ask questions, provide assistance where you can and focus on reflecting upon what you see.
✓ When interacting with staff and patients you should be polite and introduce yourself as a work experience pupil so that you are not mistaken for a current medical student.
✓ Communication is an essential skill for all healthcare professionals. It is natural to be nervous, but this is your opportunity to demonstrate confidence and your communication skills! Ensure that you talk clearly and, in a way, that the patients and staff will understand.
✓ Make time after each day to reflect on what you have learnt and put these thoughts into your reflective diary. Your written reflections will be very useful after your placement. We all think that we won’t forget things, but we do, so setting aside an extra few minutes each day for reflection could make the difference between application success and failure.

Confidentiality

It is natural to wish to discuss your experience on a work placement with friends and family. However, you must ensure that you do not disclose confidential information that could identify an individual patient or member of staff. Confidentiality is crucial to the relationship between practice staff and patients and must be maintained to ensure patients trust staff and can be open and honest about their health. You must also let your supervisor know immediately if you know any patient personally. Your practice may ask you to sign a pupil agreement form and discuss this with you on your first day.
What can you expect to see during your placement?

You will be supervised at all times and will not undertake any clinical activity. You are there to observe and learn about the skills and responsibilities of the primary healthcare team. By observing and reflecting you will begin to gain a realistic understanding of medicine.

Induction
When you start your placement, you should have a short induction with a member of staff from the practice, they most likely will: introduce you to the team, give you a tour, show you where you can eat lunch, explain who to speak to if you have a concern or find anything distressing, reiterate with you the importance of confidentiality and discuss how you should act during consultations.

Every practice is different, so every work experience placement will be different, however you may observe some of the team members below.

Reception staff
Take the opportunity to learn about and understand the workings of the practice. What is the process for receiving patients and understanding their needs? How do patients book appointments? What is the practices process for emergency appointments? What skills do staff demonstrate? What are their responsibilities and working patterns?

Practice manager
How does the organisation work? What responsibilities does the practice manager have? What skills do they demonstrate? How do the wider team members work together?

Consultations with a GP, nurse, pharmacist, physio or other healthcare team members
Patients will be told in advance that a work experience pupil is observing consultations and they will be given the option to have you present. This is their right. They may be embarrassed, feeling vulnerable or require an examination therefore they may prefer for you not to be there. In this case, politely and quickly leave the consultation; focus on ensuring the patient feels comfortable.

Be sure to agree with the staff member where you should go if you are asked to leave the consultation, do you wait outside the room? Or is there a staff room you can wait in and complete your reflective diary? Will the staff member come back to get you?

When you do observe consultations, sit where the staff member asks you to, sit up straight and remain professional. It is best not to take notes during the consultation, but immediately afterwards you can reflect on what occurred and this allows time for the staff member to complete the patients record which is very important.

If there is time, the staff member may de-brief with you after each patient and you can ask questions about the skills you witnessed, the processes and the technology used etc. You may wish to ask about how patients are referred to secondary care? Or how many patients suffer with mental health conditions or multiple conditions at once?