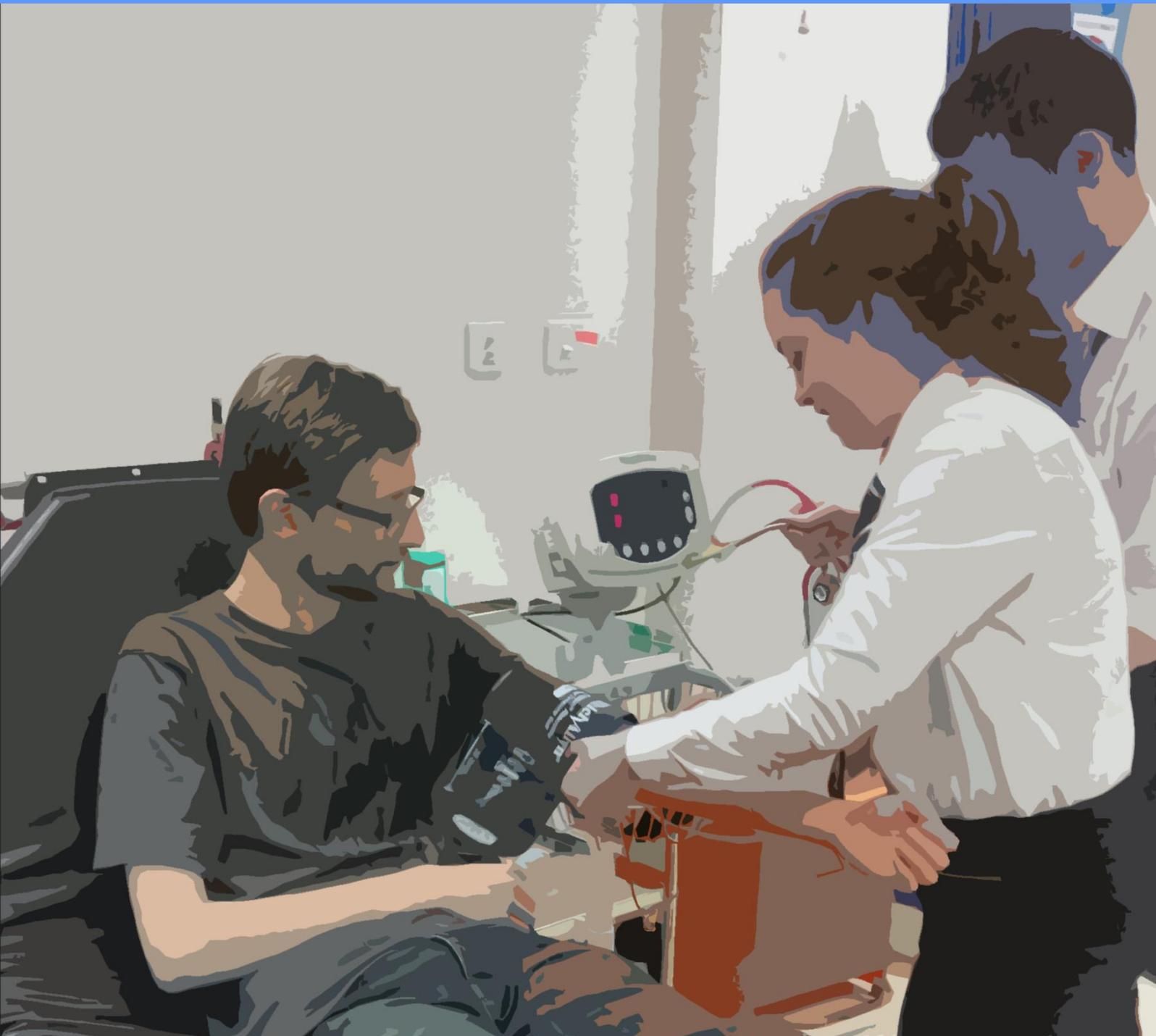




YOU CAN BE A
DOCTOR

Work experience: A guide for prospective students



A few simple tips to make sure you get the best out of your work experience.

Why are you doing the work experience?

This is a question you need to ask yourself before you start. You will need work experience to apply to medical school, but the main aim is to get an insight into the life of a doctor – good and bad. Your work experience will let find out if and why medicine is for you.

Some basics

- **Find out all you can before the day:** Make sure you know how to get to and from your work experience so you can be punctual, think about where you can get lunch and where you are meeting whoever it is you're shadowing.
- **Look smart:** In general, you should be wearing clean and smart clothes, not jeans and trainers! We recommend smart trousers and a collared shirt (a suit and tie is too formal) or a smart dress. Remember that different places have different rules. In hospitals you need to be "bare-below-the-elbow" i.e. you shouldn't have any watches or bracelets below your elbows and shirts should be rolled up.
- **Be nice, be polite:** Remember and be formal towards patients. Always call patients by their surname to start with. It's better to be too formal than to offend someone. Remember to thank the medical staff who are taking time out their day to help!
- **Confidentiality:** Trust is extremely important for the doctor-patient relationship. This means not telling anyone outwith the medical team any information about patients you see. Some things will be fascinating and you'll want to talk about it with your family and friends. This is fine as long as there is **no patient-identifiable information**. "I saw test XYZ being performed today" is fine while "I saw test XYZ being performed on a Hearts football player today" is clearly not.

Be curious! Ask questions!

Work experience is to help you decide if a career in medicine is for you but you may well be interested in some of the technical aspects of what you're seeing! Don't be afraid to ask if you want to learn more.

Although they might be busy, everyone likes enthusiasm and they will be more than happy to answer your questions. No one expects you to know any medicine at all so make use of this opportunity! Medical students are another great source of help - it wasn't long ago they were on work experience themselves.

Write and reflect about your experience

Writing about your experience will help you make the most of it. You will need to write about this in your personal statement anyway so it's a good idea to get something down while the "experience" is still fresh in your mind. Don't wait long - memories can fade fast. Write about what you gained and how you felt rather than what you did.

Gibb's reflective cycle might be a useful tool.

You will undoubtedly come across some interesting scenarios during your work experience and if you are unsure what to make of the situation then ask for help!

Quality, not quantity

We're always asked "How much work experience do I need?". There's no easy answer to that – it's the quality of the work experience you do and what YOU gain from it which matters much more than the amount you do!



Figure 1: Gibbs's Reflective Cycle

(<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education/learning-teach-becoming-reflective-practitioner/content-section-6.2>)

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

The following is a list of possible questions you might consider asking the health care professionals you are following around:

- **Questions about the job:**
 - *What is your job like? What are the good and parts of your job?*
 - *What do you particularly enjoy or hate about your job?*
 - *Do you manage to find a good work-life balance with your job?*
 - *How do you deal with emotionally difficult situations?*
- **Questions about career:**
 - *Why did you choose to go into the healthcare profession?*
 - *Do you have any advice for an applicant entering your career?*
 - *What did you have to do to get to your job now?*
- **Specific questions:**
 - *I was interested in XYZ, especially after seeing the previous patient. Would you be able to tell me more about this or point me in the right direction?*

CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist to establish what you should have established by the end of your work experience:

- Learned about what aspects of a career in medicine can involve
- Found out about the positives of a medical career
- Found out about the negatives of a medical career
- Kept a record of your work experience
- Reflected on your work experience
- Learned more about whether YOU would be suited for a career in medicine
- Sent a thank you card to the professionals you followed

GOOD LUCK!

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