Professionalism for applicants to medicine

Doctors hold trusted positions in society and must make sure that their conduct – both personally and professionally – justifies their patients' trust in them and the public's trust in the medical profession. This is called professionalism – or the values and behaviours that underpin the trust the public places in doctors.

Professionalism is about treating others how you would like to be treated. It is not a tick box exercise or something you should adhere to solely for the purposes of your medical school application. Applicants to medicine courses should aim to embody the values and behaviours of good doctors in their daily lives.

Why is professionalism important?

It is a great privilege to become a doctor and be responsible for the treatment and care of patients. Trust is the binding glue in patient-doctor relationships and professionalism ensures that the trust placed in doctors is rightfully earned and maintained. It can take years to build trust and only moments to lose it. For this reason it is important that doctors' behaviour in their work and private lives reflects their position of responsibility in society.

How can applicants demonstrate professional behaviour?

Following professional standards of behaviour does not begin on your first day at medical school. Medical schools in the UK aim to prepare students for practice in the NHS and therefore seek applicants who have the potential to become good doctors. Before you apply to study medicine and during the application process you need to be aware of the standards expected of medical students and doctors and apply these in your professional and private lives.

Some elements of professionalism that medical schools look for at the point of admission you can start to develop now. These include:

- Communicating effectively with a wide range of people
- Teamwork skills
- Developing healthy ways to cope with stress and challenges
- Dealing with doubt and uncertainty
- Taking responsibility for your own learning and development
- Being responsive to feedback
- Being able to reflect on your own strengths and weaknesses
- Establishing a good work-life balance
- Dealing with and mitigating against personal bias including unconscious biases

At this stage in the process medical schools understand that you are at the start of developing your professional identity and skills. What they are looking for is your potential to develop, with their support, these skills and attributes. The capacity to reflect on your own behaviour and use constructive feedback to improve is an important quality which medical schools seek in applicants.

Where can applicants find out more about professionalism?

The General Medical Council (GMC) and the Medical Schools Council (MSC) have published guidance on *Achieving good medical practice* which outlines the standards expected of medical students – both inside and outside of medical school. This guidance explains how the principles and values of the GMC's core guidance for doctors, *Good medical practice*, applies to medical students.

The MSC has also produced guidance for applicants on the core values and attributes needed to study medicine. Understanding the qualities that medical schools seek in applicants will help you to reflect on your own experiences and think about your suitability for medical training and how you can reflect on these within the application process.

Further reading

- Achieving good medical practice
- Core values and attributes needed to study medicine
- NHS Constitution