

# Sen's 'Know Your Medical School' Checklist

When preparing for medical school interviews it's easy to get lots in all the 'why medicine', ethical and skills-based questions and answers. What most students overlook however is preparing for the specific medical school they're applying to. It will be quite embarrassing when you can't answer a basic question about an institution where you may be spending 5-6 years of your life. So best prepare well and avoid that.

Here's a checklist of the ideal things you should go through to find out critical information about each of the medical schools you receive interviews from. The checklist is in no particular order – all aspects are important to research, understand and keep in memory.

## 1. Teaching, Course Structure and Modules

Any medical school course has vast content to cover over the degree period. This content is split into placements and modules, taught in a systematic way. Is the medical course split into broad scientific disciplines such as Biochemistry, Physiology, Pharmacology etc, or is it a systems-based approach whereby the body is broken into modules such as respiratory system, circulatory system and reproductive system. Your different medical school choices will have these differences, thus specific knowledge of this is key.

Know well whether teaching will be lecture-based, case-based learning or problem-based learning. Know about any small group teaching that also takes place. Develop reasons for why your style of learning will fit with each medical school's specific style of teaching. Medical courses at Cambridge and Oxford have compulsory laboratory sessions during the first two years. These can take place 3-4 times a week, for different modules. At Cambridge this is complemented by four hour of dissection per week, for first year.

Appreciating these details and incorporating them into why you chose a specific medical school will help you stand out.

## 2. Patient Contact Opportunities

Good clinical skills underpin excellent care of patients. Good clinical skills differentiate a good doctor from an excellent doctor. Such skills are only developed during the time you spend with patients and in a clinical setting under the supervision of doctors, practising history taking, doing investigations and working out the next steps of care.

It is really important know when you will meet the first patients and in what capacity. Different medical schools let students meet at different times in the courses.

**Traditional Course:** E.g. Cambridge. You hardly see patients until your later years of medical school.

**Integrated Course:** E.g. St George's, you may meet patients within the first term of your studies.

Research into this and know well the benefits that different Universities' approaches bring. Early patient contact can help you develop your skills and confidence sooner whereas later patient contact may allow you to first develop a very strong scientific foundation, on top of which you will develop your clinical skills.

### **3. Teaching Hospitals**

A well-read medical school applicant will appreciate where clinical training will take during medical school. Thus, look up key teaching hospitals that a medical school sends students to and know roughly their locations and specialities (if any). For some medical schools, favourably located teaching hospitals might help you justify why you are applying to that medical school.

For example, if applying to UCL, you may wish to mention the great opportunities of training in some of the best specialist hospitals in the country including Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) and University College Hospital. It will be worthwhile reading into and discussing how being in Central London can help expose you to a greatly varied demographic, that will expose you to a range of illnesses and various presentations of such illnesses.

Equally, applying to Cambridge, you can mention how teaching hospitals across East Anglia will allow you to enjoy your clinical training amidst wonderful countryside areas.

### **4. Intercalations/Research Opportunities**

A lot of medicine involves progression, both in terms of clinical skills and technology of care. Large parts of this are derived from an interest many scientists, medical students and clinicians have in academic research. For medical schools such as Oxford and Cambridge, an interest in research and innovation is particularly important to show.

Look into the intercalation opportunities a medical school has. Know which year it takes place in and what options you have will. Have an idea of a few courses that interest you and think of reasons why you would want to take them. For example, if you have an interest in Orthopaedic Surgery and Robotic Surgery, it may be good to know about and mention any Medical Engineering intercalation opportunities a medical school may offer. Discuss how such a degree will teach you the fundamental engineering principles needed to design and develop such systems, and how this will help you be a technology-orientated clinician when you're older. Mention how it will improve your abilities of interdisciplinary communication, amongst doctors and engineers, to help develop better care approaches for patients.

In terms of research, if you are genuinely interested, visit a research laboratory or two 1-2 years before applying in order to understand translational research. Mention your appreciation for lab-based/clinical research, and how an academic career is of interest to you. Also be aware of international research internships that you can take part of through the University.

Keep in mind, always place your research interests within the context of medicine and becoming a well-rounded doctor. Otherwise, interviewers may ask why you are not studying Biology/Biochemistry/Biomedical Sciences.

### 5. General Trivia

A keen student with good intent of studying at a specific medical school, will do a fair amount of background reading about the institution. Interviewers may look out for this and ask you specific questions and rightfully so! A few things to look up:

- when the medical school was founded
- founders of the medical school
- key figures of historical importance to the medical school
- previous amalgamations of smaller medical schools into the current one
- main buildings and hospitals
- significant contributions made to medical practice, by the medical school
- famous current scientists/doctors

### Conclusion: Your Favourite Aspects and Good Integration into Answers

Having done your research, it's really important to highlight a few particular things about the medical school you like and look forward to getting involved with. It is important to keep in mind specific things, including why you like them and why you are excited by them. It's critical to use specific examples, gained from the aforementioned sections, to bring together a holistic answer that is detailed, personalised to your preferences and of relevance!

For example, if applying to Cambridge, you may mention their unique physiology practicals and how they will provide you with an interactive way of learning medical physiology that is on top of lecture and supervision-centred learning.

Another example may be if you are applying to UCL. You may wish to mention the superlative location of this medical school in one of the world's 'world cities' (London) and how you are excited by the prospect of meeting a large variety of patients. Highlight how this exposure to a varied population and thus different presentations of disease, will benefit your training in becoming a well-rounded and highly skilled doctor.

To conclude, having specific knowledge about your medical school will show interviewers that you are genuinely interested in them, thus greatly increasing your chance of being offered a place to study medicine there.