

ASME Abstract

Students' perspectives on preparing for and getting into medical school

A Timm

Admission to study medicine at British Universities is highly competitive and each medical school decides on its own selection criteria and operates its own admissions policy (though applications are handled centrally through the Universities & Colleges Admissions Service, UCAS). Applicants' secondary school grades at A-level are vital to the selection process everywhere (though some schools may also consider GCSEs, which are commonly taken at age 16). In an effort to distinguish among the many similarly qualified applicants, various medical schools have introduced entrance tests and the majority also interview applicants. For school leavers, prior work experience or volunteering within a health or social care setting is vital and needs to be reflected in the personal statements that form part of the application; together with references from teachers. Most admissions tutors and selection committee members would probably consider the broad outline of this process unremarkable; although medical education journals bear testimony to passionate debates about the specifics of whether (and how) to interview and what the merits of the different entrance tests are, if any.

But what about the students? This study, entitled *Hopes and Fears of new medical students* sought to find out what students make of this process of gaining admission to medical school. There is some fascinating literature from within the widening participation debate (about explicit and implicit barriers and biases), but the voice and perspectives of ordinary school leavers has remained peculiarly absent from the discussions about medical school admissions. The project asks: How do applicants prepare for medical school? What do they make of this process – the jumping through hoops? Who else is involved in their decision- making? What can they expect from their secondary schools? What do they take away from events such as MEDLINK and other pre-medicine career guidance? What are they planning to do if medicine doesn't work out?

Crucially, the project started interviewing prospective students (n=12) prior to their arrival at medical school. The data reported here consists of in-depth interviews with students about how they prepared for their university applications; it also compares the interview data with their UCAS statements. Two aspects will be of particular interest to medical school managers, and especially selectors and the presentation will focus on these:

- the degree of variation in students' prior experience of health or social care settings, and
- the provenance of application materials.