If you plan to apply for medical training then you’ll need to be able to demonstrate some relevant work experience. When it comes to work experience, quality is better than quantity. In terms of making an application to medical school, what matters is that you can show what you have learned from this experience.

There are different ways of gaining this practical exposure in healthcare – although there are often limited places. It could be through a formalised placement scheme or time spent volunteering. In general it will be non-clinical work, but this will still allow you to gain first-hand experience of patient care. You might think about spending time as a care assistant working with sick people, or if you are fortunate, arranging to shadow a doctor. This sheet explores some of the options available to you, and how and where to find suitable opportunities.

Remember that the most important thing is to reflect on the experience so that you will be able to talk about what you learnt that will be useful to you as a trainee doctor.

Getting experience in the NHS

The NHS Careers website is https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk. This gives in-depth profiles of the full spectrum of jobs within the health service, and will be useful in giving you an idea of some of the other roles which would give you a practical exposure to care work. Additionally, the NHS has a central job listing at www.jobs.nhs.uk.

For placements it will be necessary to contact your local trust directly, as the person or department responsible for work experience placements (if these are offered) varies from trust to trust. Contact details for London hospitals are given on this sheet – some offer placements and take volunteers, whilst others only have places for volunteers. For NHS Trusts outside of London use the search facilities here: http://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/pages/acutetrustlisting.aspx.

Most trusts will have more than one hospital site – for example the UCL Hospitals Trust manages 7 hospitals, as well as other outreach services at other sites.

If you call their main switchboard and ask who deals with student placements you should be put through to the right department – most hospitals have a voluntary services unit, which would be a good place to begin.

London hospitals

The following London Trusts offer placements in their hospitals. To be eligible for placements in some hospitals, you must be resident in the local borough.

Barts and the London
Work experience candidates must be resident in Tower Hamlets. Contact the Training and Development Department (020 7480 4647). For volunteering see www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/work-with-us/volunteer-for-us/

Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals
For volunteers and work experience opportunities contact the Voluntary Services (01708 746090 ext 3004) or see www.bhrhospitals.nhs.uk

Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals
Volunteering and work experience placements are only available to residents of the borough, and are managed by the Voluntary Services department (020 8216 4449) or see www.bcf.nhs.uk

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust
Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust (Hammersmith, Charing Cross, Queen Charlotte’s & Chelsea, St. Mary’s, Western Eye Hospital)

Information on volunteering is available at: www.imperial.nhs.uk/workwithus/index.htm

Homerton University Hospital
Work experience placements are for local school/college students only (14-18). For details see www.homerton.nhs.uk/choosing-homerton/working-at-homerton

Alternatively, volunteers who can commit to at least three hours a week for at least six months can find out more at www.homerton.nhs.uk/choosing-homerton/volunteering

The Hillingdon Hospital
The Voluntary Services department coordinates all opportunities: www.thh.nhs.uk

King’s College Hospital
Information on volunteering is available at www.kch.nhs.uk/about/get-involved/volunteering

Kingston Hospital
Information for potential volunteers can be found at www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk/get-involved/volunteering.aspx

For work experience, see www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk/working-for-us/work-experience

The Lewisham Hospital
For short term work experience see www.lewisham.nhs.uk
Royal Free Hampstead
The Voluntary Services Department operates at two sites – the acute hospital on the main site (020 7830 2306) and at Queen Mary’s centre for health services for the elderly (020 7431 4111). See www.royalfree.nhs.uk (click ‘about us’ and then ‘how you can help’)

St George’s Healthcare
Work experience placements for students are available over the summer, and volunteers are taken for three month placements. Contact the Voluntary Services Manager (020 8725 1452) or see www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/careersVol.asp

St Mary’s
St Mary’s is now part of the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.
See their details (above) for information on work experience and volunteering. Alternatively, contact the HR department (020 7886 1421) or contact the Voluntary Services Manager (020 886 6578).

University College London Hospitals
For volunteering, including on wards, contact the Voluntary Services Manager (020 7380 9828) or see www.uclh.nhs.uk/wwus/volunteer/Pages/Home.aspx

West Middlesex University Hospital
The Trust offers work experience opportunities for year 10-13 students: http://www.west-middlesex-hospital.nhs.uk

Mental Health Trusts
Other opportunities may be available at Mental Health Trusts. Find details of Trusts and their hospitals by using the following site – use the listing to find a trust near you. http://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/pages/mentalhealthtrustlisting.aspx

Care work in other settings
Relevant care experience could involve working in other services, such as a residential or homeless centre. In addition, experience of mentoring and tutoring, volunteer counselling, befriending services to the disadvantaged or elderly or other community work would all be useful.

Care Homes, hospices and other welfare services
You should be able to find details of other local social care or welfare services from your local authority website (see www.direct.gov.uk/en/DI1/Directories/Localcouncils/index.htm for details)

For charity-run services, try searching the Guidestar charity database at www.guidestar.org.uk

Hospice Information provides a directory of all hospices in the UK at www.helpthehospices.org.uk/hospiceinformation St Christopher’s Hospice in South London accepts volunteers (www.stchristophers.org.uk)

Part-time (paid) Healthcare Work
If you would like to gain relevant experience whilst earning money to support your time as a student, you may wish to consider getting part-time work as a healthcare assistant or similar role. Many of these jobs will be handled by specialist recruitment agencies: the following resources can help you to identify vacancies and relevant organisations:

The Recruitment & Education Confederation
(www.rec.uk.com) provides lists of agencies recruiting into different areas. A comprehensive list of agencies can be found by selecting ‘members’-directory of members. Then select the sector (healthcare) and geographical region you are interested in. The full link is www.rec.uk.com/membership/member-directory

Great Social Care
www.greatsocialcare.com
This site includes a list of relevant social care agencies as well as advertising their vacancies.

Recruitment agencies
Hays Social Care: www.hays.co.uk/jobs-search/index.htm
Eden Brown: www.edenbrown.com
Adecco www.adecco.co.uk
Reed Social Care www.reedhealth.com

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