



MEDICAL INTERVIEWS *Demystified*

Unlock the secret of winning at medical job interviews

AT ONE STAGE OR ANOTHER IN YOUR career, most doctors will have to go through a medical interview process. In general for trainees, these are often competitive, stressful and a step into the unknown.

Interview season for registrars seeking accredited positions is fast approaching. This is also a time where many final year advanced trainees will be applying and interviewing for their first consultant jobs. Along with a polished CV and glowing references, good interview skills are a major determinant of success in applying for your preferred position.

The distinction between each registrar applying for accredited positions is very subtle. Most, if not all, will have the mandatory qualifications necessary to be eligible. The main differences will be in their academic achievements and the ability to answer difficult questions about hypothetical scenarios.

The Interview Panel

The registrar selection panels can be formed by either the speciality college or the health service. The college formed panels are made up of senior specialists who also often perform a variety of other college committee

roles. The health service selection panels comprise of a panel of senior staff including:

1. Director/ Deputy Director of the Department
2. Medical Director/ Clinical Director of the hospital
3. Supervisor of Training for the department
4. Other senior consultants within the Department
5. Non-medical staff e.g. Human Resource Managers

A similar health service panel is used for interviewing candidates for new consultant positions.

This is where the similarity between registrar and consultant interviews stops. Registrar interviews focus on assessing whether the candidate is a safe, compliant, motivated trainee who is academically equipped sufficiently to pass the exams. Consultant interviews have a greater focus on reviewing potential non-clinical contributions that the candidate can offer the overall department:

- **Non-medical managerial skills** – leadership, organisation, ethics, conflict resolution
- **Ability to increase the department's status** – research, education, audits, committee work
- **Areas of 'Unique Expertise'** – areas of non clinical knowledge such as extensive medico-legal experience
- **Interpersonal skills and personality**

Many people believe the subject matter and questions asked in interviews are vastly diverse, however this incorrect. The majority of medical interviews are based on a standard format.

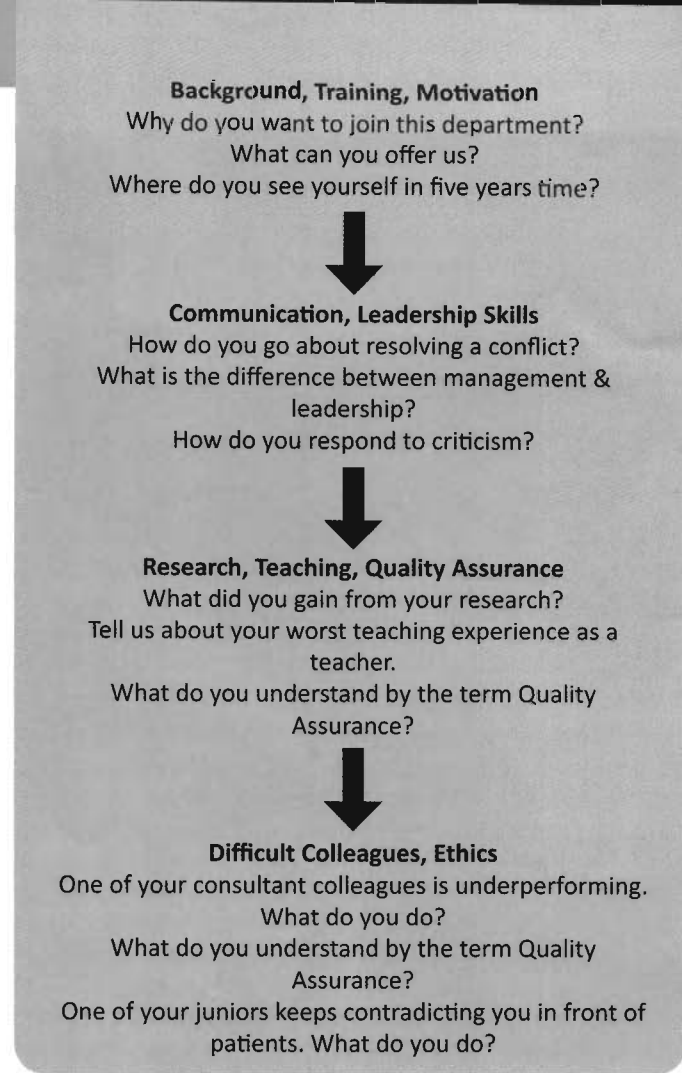
Basic Anatomy of a Medical Job Interview

Most medical interviews will last between twenty minutes to an hour and will generally consist of questions asked on four topics. The exception to this rule is where there is a Structured Interviews format, such as the RACS SET interviews, where the questions are not necessarily in the same order but the content is often still similar.

Your suitability for a particular career path is likely to be selected on the basis of approximately ten questions. The importance of having practiced answering questions on all these topics can not be overemphasised.

General Interview Advice

1. Listen carefully to the question. Don't make them ask it more than once
2. Make eye contact with the interviewer before speaking. Initially address the panel member who asked the question and then glance around to also engage the entire panel
3. Adopt a relaxed posture and sit squarely in the chair
4. Keep to the point and aim to be precise; give a full answer and do not waffle. A good method is to give a framework to



your answer e.g. 'There are three aspects to this; one...'

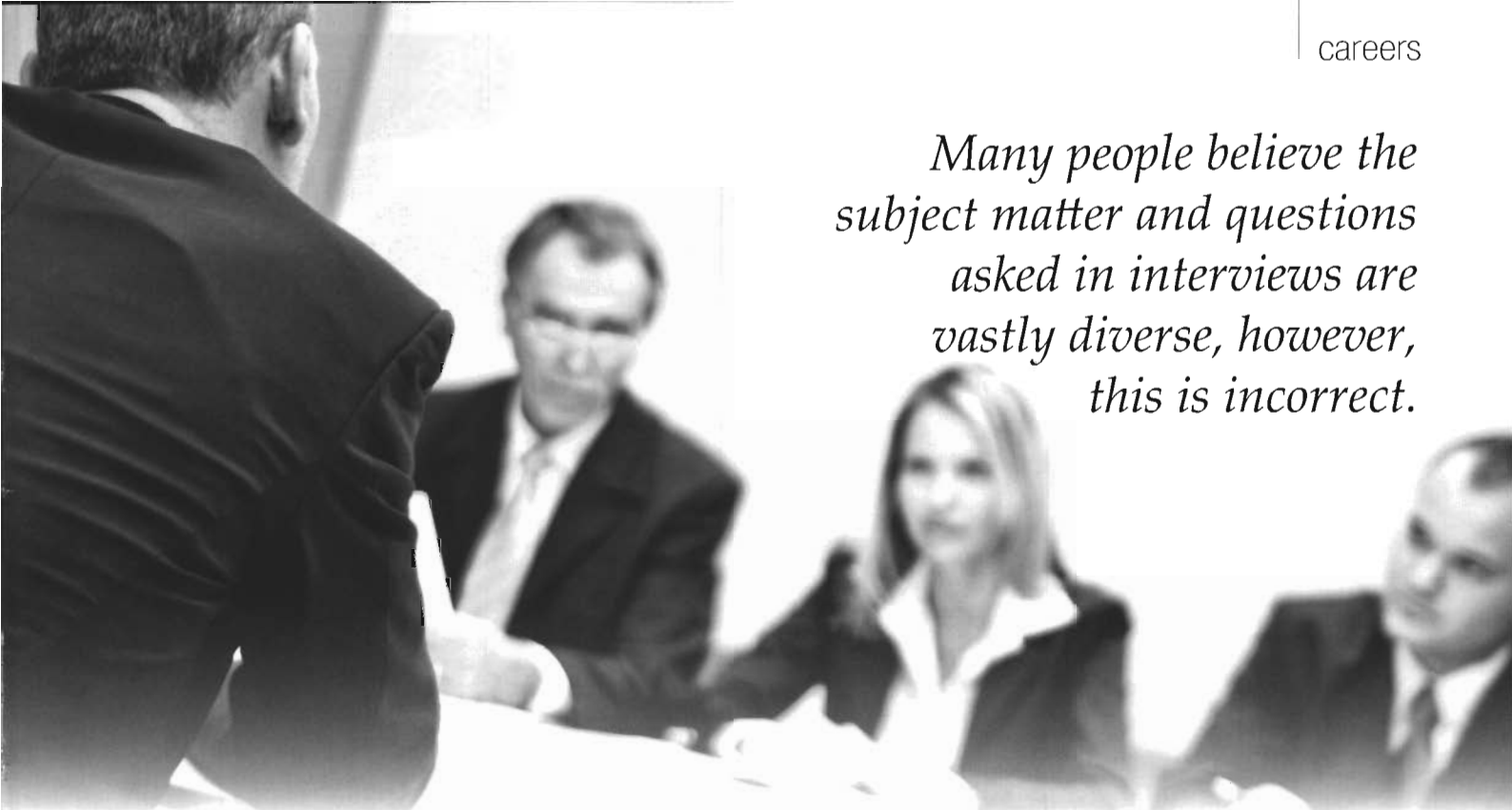
5. Structure your answer; it should be logical and clearly understood
6. Do not speak too quickly. Try to speak about 20% slower than your normally would
7. Ensure you are professional and demonstrate controlled enthusiasm and drive
8. At the end of the interview take your leave as smoothly and politely as possible. Thank the panel for their time through the Chairman

How to answer "Do you have any questions?"

You should always come to an interview armed with some questions. Saying that you don't have any questions is a sign of disinterest and apathy. Ask sensible, leading questions that give you an opportunity to 'promote' your suitability if the answer provided by the interviewer shows an opportunity. Some examples of this include:

- What are you looking for in a new consultant?
- Are there any major service reforms planned?
- What are the teaching and research opportunities?
- What are the links with the medical school?
- What is the relationship between clinicians and management

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like?

What is the scope for service development?

How to Answer Individual Questions

In essence, the decision about your suitability for a particular position is going to be decided on a series of 5-15 open-ended questions. Here are some simple rules in providing excellent answers for every question:

1. Never answer the question directly
2. Make sure your answers are structured and illustrated with a real-life example
3. Always conclude your answer to create an 'obvious endpoint'
4. Make the interview panel 'like you'

The most common mistake made in interviews is that candidates answer questions defensively to try and avoid saying something silly. You should try to do the exact opposite. You should be providing confident answers demonstrating your knowledge and experience. Most candidates focus on demonstrating knowledge and forget to illustrate this with a real life example.

Typical question: Tell me about the Audit Cycle?

A common basic response would be:

Audits are a method of comparing the current standard of clinical care to a gold standard or an industry set standard. Ideally, the results are measured, evaluated and fed back to the relevant entities to complete the audit cycle.

A better and more structured answer would be:

The audit cycle is a continuous process where existing practice is judged against set standards. Step one is for the standard to be set. Step two involves judging existing practice against those set standards. Step three is about presenting and discussing the data comparing existing practice against the set standards and step four involves changing current practice to move nearer to the standards of best practice. Practice is then re-evaluated in a cyclical process to further enhance clinical practice in an ongoing, ever-improving system.

This answer demonstrates great knowledge but zero experience.

An outstanding answer would be:

The above knowledgeable answer followed by an illustration **demonstrating application of knowledge** "...In my last audit on the discharge process at XY hospital we decided to set our standards by looking at the policies set..."

Structuring your answers

Your goals in every answer should be to:

1. Give the interview panel the idea that you have **organised thinking**
2. Make your answers as **easy as possible to listen to**
3. **Effectively get your message across** to the interview panel
4. **Demonstrate experience** by illustrating your theoretical answers with personal situations

A recommended structure to use when answering interview questions is:

Recommended Structure for Answering Questions

Typical Question with Examples:

What makes you a good team player?

Listen Attentively – After being asked the question, remain quiet for 5 seconds (write notes as required)

Think about three skills you want to 'promote' about yourself during the answer.

In this case, you could be thinking about promoting your Communication Skills, Organised Thinking Ability and your Extensive Experience in working in a team.

Introduction – start the answer with a "Motherhood Statement" and describe what structure you will answer the question with.

Motherhood statement – *"Most medical processes involve teamwork and the ability to safely and harmoniously work as part of a diverse team is mandatory in every medical profession."*

Describe structure – *"I'm going to identify some key skills which make a good team member and illustrate how these contribute to effective teamwork"*

Body – Go through the main part of your answer with the examples

"Teamwork involves a variety of key skills such as:
 - **Good communication** - both speaking and listening, respectfully and clearly
 - **Commitment to a shared goal** and ability to take on any designated role within the team
 - **Decision Making** – has to be objective and effective to avoid 'dilution of responsibility' where a team makes a poor decision because no individual wants to step up and take responsibility.

My most recent example of effective teamwork is well demonstrated by a recent Cardiac Arrest I attended where I was the team leader and

There was clear communication of....,

There was an implicit commitment to a shared goal (the resuscitation of the patient) and I delegated roles for airway, circulation and scribing to others in my team...."

Conclusion – Final sentence linking the question asked, any examples quoted, the skill learnt and the position you applied for.

"In summary, teamwork relies on a number of key facets of which I identified clear communication, effective decision making and commitment to a shared goal as being the most important."

Similarly, in the post as athat I am interviewing for, great leadership, excellent followership and good team working are important in..... where interaction with is an everyday part of the job."

List of the most common questions asked in Medical Interviews for Consultants and Registrars:

BACKGROUND, TRAINING, MOTIVATION:

Take us through your CV
 Why do you want to join this department?
 What can you offer to this department?
 How does your training meet the needs of the post?
 What makes you think that you are fit to become a consultant?
 What are the advantages and disadvantages of employing locum consultants?
 Where do you see yourself in 5/10/20 years' time?
 How do you see your career developing over the next 10 years?
 Looking back at your training, what did you like the most and the least?
 If you had the chance, what would you change in your training?
 Why should we give you this job?
 What was your greatest professional challenge in the past 5 years?
 What do you like the most and the least about this specialty?
 How do you identify your weaknesses?
 What do you think will be your biggest challenge in this post?
 How do you measure success?

GENERIC, COMMUNICATION & LEADERSHIP SKILLS:

How would you describe your communication skills?
 What makes you a good communicator?
 What is more important: good communication or good clinical skills?
 Give an example of a situation where you failed to communicate appropriately.
 Give an example of a non-clinical situation where your communication skills made a difference to the outcome of a project.
 How can you show empathy through an interpreter?
 What makes you a good team player?
 Give an example of a situation where you made a difference to a team.
 Give an example of a dysfunctional team in which you worked. How did you deal with it and what did you learn from that experience?
 Tell us about your management experience.
 What is the difference between management & leadership?
 Can you learn management by going to management courses?
 Do doctors need management skills?
 What does leadership mean to you and when do you exercise it?

What makes you a good leader?
 Give an example of a situation where you showed leadership.
 Are leaders born leaders or can you learn to become a leader?
 What type of leader are you?
 Are you a leader or a follower?
 What makes a good team?
 How do you deal with stress?
 Give an example of a situation where you showed initiative.
 How do you implement change in a unit?
 How do you go about fighting resistance from others when you want to change something?
 In what circumstances have you had to influence others and how did you achieve your objectives?
 How possible is it to motivate and develop junior doctors in the current climate?
 How do you motivate others?
 How would your boss motivate you?
 How do you go about resolving a conflict?
 Tell us about a conflict which you had with a colleague?
 Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a conflict within your team?
 What skills have you got which make you a good consultant?
 Would you be happy being an average consultant?
 What skills do you feel you need to improve the most?
 What are your strengths?
 What is your main weakness?
 How would your colleagues describe you?
 How would your patients describe you?
 How do you know that your colleagues trust you?
 How do you respond to criticism?

RESEARCH, AUDITS, TEACHING:

Tell us about your teaching experience.
 How do you cope with teaching multidisciplinary groups?
 Tell us about Problem-Based Learning? What are its pros and cons?
 What kind of teaching do you like/dislike the most?
 Tell us about your worst teaching experience as a teacher.
 What have you learnt from the teaching courses you attended?
 Do you think that anyone can be taught?
 How would you entice a junior doctor who had shown an interest into your specialty to join the specialty as a career?
 What do you understand by the term Quality

Assurance?
 What is the difference between a good teacher and an excellent teacher?
 Other than by attending courses, how would you improve your teaching skills?
 Tell us about some of the negative feedback that you have received following your teaching sessions.
 Tell us about your research experience.
 What is your understanding and experience of research governance?
 What did you gain from your research?
 Do you think that all trainees should do research?
 What is the role and importance of research for a junior trainee?
 How do you go about seeking ethical approval?
 How would you go about seeking funding for your research?
 How do you keep up to date?
 How do you identify your weaknesses and deficiencies?
 What contribution can you make to risk management?
 Do you believe in a no-blame culture?
 When did you last have to complete a critical incident form?
 How would you encourage your team to complete critical incident forms each time it is appropriate?

DIFFICULT COLLEAGUES & ETHICAL ISSUES:

One of your consultant colleagues is underperforming or his quality of care is unsatisfactory. What do you do?
 One of your juniors complains to you that they are being bullied by another consultant. How do you handle the situation?
 You receive a complaint from one of the nurses that a consultant has been sighted taking opiates from the drug cupboard. How do you handle this complaint?
 One of your junior colleagues comes in late by over 20 minutes repeatedly. What do you do?
 One of your juniors keeps contradicting you in front of patients. What do you do?
 A senior consultant turns up drunk for work one morning. How do you handle the situation?
 You overhear two nurses talk about the fact that one of your registrars was taking cocaine last Friday when he went clubbing. How do you address the situation?
 Assuming that you report a colleague's bad performance to your clinical director. What would you expect him to do about it?
 What difference do you make between lack of fitness to practice and underperformance?

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- How to Succeed at the Medical Interview (HOW - How To) by Chris Smith and Darryl Meeking (Paperback - May 2, 2008)
- The Medical Job Interview: Secrets for Success by Colin John Mumford (Paperback - July 1, 2005)
- How to Wow 'em at Your Next Job Interview.: An article from: Family Practice News by Nathan D. Childs (Digital - July 28, 2005) - HTML
- The Physician in Transition: Managing the Job Interview by Don L. Double (Paperback - Jan. 1997)
- www.medicalinterviewpreparation.co.uk by Dr Nalin Wickramasuriya
- Consultant Medical Interview: All you need to know by Anonymous (Paperback - Oct. 1, 2009) www.consultantmedicalinterview.com