

## Get Onboard: Medical Specialty Decision



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*Determining what you would like to ultimately specialise in requires careful planning. But what steps can you take and what can you do now to ensure you achieve your goal?*

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### Where do you want to go?

- Reflections and insights for seeking clarity
- Do I have what it takes to get to my preferred destination? (CV, Selection criteria, personality style)
- Emotional Intelligence and its relationship to medical career decision making
- The Interview

### What do you need to do to get there?

- Tasks – what do you need to do now (planning)
- Tools – what tools, extra training might assist you in getting there (eg. Websites, conferences, training courses)

***You may be taking time to decide on your destination because there are two or three strong possibilities or you have decided but need to reflect on your decision.***

### **Reflections and insights for seeking clarity:**

- Are the roles, tasks and duties compatible with my personality, attributes and skills?
- Is my decision-making sound? What is my specialty headspace?
- Have I set myself too big a goal?
- How do I focus my priorities? (*What am I good at, what do people tell me I am good at?*)
- Do I have “sounding board” mentors and teachers who have an accumulation of wisdom?
- What are my values and will they align in the context of making this decision?
- Have others influenced me to consider a specialty that I am unsure about?
- How happy are the team (s) in my hospital in my chosen specialty/s (*If they are not very happy will I become “one of them”*).
- What will my day to day working life be like in this specialty? Reality check! (*My passion is what I love, my reality is what I can do. My interest in a subject does not guarantee success*).
- Is a specialty appealing to me mainly because of monetary reward?
- Will a certain specialty support the personal outcomes I want for my life, relationships, family, location? *Some specialties are more likely to have contexts that stay in your head and affect your home life. Think about what you know about yourself and your mental health.*
- Will I have difficulty getting accepted for a training place?
- Do I need another direction?
- Do I need to understand the aspects of my personality most closely associated with my career specialty interests?
- Have I considered other personal and professional variables?

### **Why do doctors choose one career over another?**

There is relatively little research into the career decision-making process for doctors regarding medical specialties. In June 2017 BMA published the paper “Influences on Choice of Medical Career” which found factors such as living in a preferred location were important as well as finding enjoyment. Earnings and status were not major considerations. Read [www.bma.org.uk](http://www.bma.org.uk)

Another study (Zhou Jiang Dec 2017) looked at the role of decision making variables and personal styles as ways to resolve decisional conflict. [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net) A key difference between styles is the amount of information considered.

The following tasks are identified:

- Self-appraisal
- Goal selection
- Gathering of career information
- Problem solving

## Planning for the future

A study by Scott and Bruce 2008 identified different styles which may be useful when considering how to approach career specialty decision making. [Paei.wikidot.com](http://Paei.wikidot.com) The styles they considered were:

### Rational

- Extensive information research and a systematic evaluation of identifying

### Intuitive

- Confidence in one's own intuition and feelings

### Dependent

- Seeking advice and opinions of others before deciding

### Avoidant

- An attempt to avoid decision- making as far as possible

### Spontaneous

- Immediate intuition and a desire to reach a decision as quickly as possible

## Do I have what it takes me to get me to my preferred destination?

### Self – appraisal (be realistic)

What does my **CV** look like?

- Qualifications/Courses
- Evidence of skills
- Evidence of interest and commitment to the specialty
- Examples of leadership
- Examples of teaching and mentoring
- Research
- Conferences and workshops
- Referees (do they know me well and have they given very positive feedback? Have I asked them?)

### Does my background and CV “fit” for this speciality trip?

- Economy: Cannot claim to fulfil all the selection criteria
- Business: Has a suitable background to fulfil the selection criteria
- First class: Can fulfil all selection criteria very competently?

Have I read and re-read the job description, tasks and do I understand the roles?

### Do I know how to address selection criteria competently?

**The STAR model is useful:**

- **Situation** – brief outline of who was involved. What was your role?
- **Task** - what did you do? What happened next?
- **Action/ approach** – how did you do it?
- **Result** – what was the outcome? What feedback did you receive?

Don't generalise, be specific, give action examples that demonstrate your competence. Write about a third to half a page addressing each criteria, ask someone who has expertise in this area to look over your SC or a colleague who has successfully applied for this college.

### **I don't really know where I want to go on my trip but I know I need to go somewhere**

- List the units and rotations that as an intern and RMO you liked/did not like and your reasons
- Increase your self-awareness and gain insight into how others might perceive you. Your style, your enduring patterns of thinking and behaving.

A quick and easy way to do this is to complete a Myers Briggs Personality Inventory Questionnaire (MBTI).

### **The Myers Briggs personality Inventory ([www.myersbriggs.org](http://www.myersbriggs.org))**

The outcome is not set in concrete and is only part of how you come across but it can be a very useful tool.

It is worth looking at the official website as there is some material online relating to the MBTI that is not necessarily genuine or helpful.

The genuine sites may require you to pay a fee to undertake the questionnaire which includes feedback but you may find that it is well worth it. [www.myersbriggs.org](http://www.myersbriggs.org)

The outcomes of the MBTI will give you some ideas about what specialties you might enjoy and what you might be good at because of your natural inclination and preferred style.

## **Emotional Intelligence (EI): why it matters for doctors in career decision making. Fluff or Substance, Fact or Fad?**

A recent study found that Emotional Intelligence (EI or EQ) is regarded as an essential factor influencing career decision making because people with higher EI tend to use emotional experiences to guide their thoughts and experiences (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Perez & Gati 2013).

They are more likely to foresee and be emotionally prepared for the outcomes of various career options. They might know what they want specialty wise but cannot get a training place. Their EI awareness may assist in acceptance of another option.

EQ is "a short hand that psychological researchers use to describe how well individuals can manage their emotions and react to the emotions of others." (Eric Ravenscraft). Professionals who have low impulse control regarding emotions have the most problems at work—something to think about when choosing your career.

In 1995 Daniel Goleman wrote a book titled *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*, which generated a flood of interest in the role that emotional intelligence plays in people's lives.

His book was based on years of research into psychological functioning and interpersonal skills. The so called SOFT SKILLS which do so much to determine our success in life became recognized as critical factors and gained huge recognition. In a way, to measure EQ is to measure one's "common sense" and ability to get along in the world. Emotion is a source of energy, it drives action, so being self-aware is our "emotional rudder". There are countless examples of doctors who are brilliant procedurally but who cannot relate well to patients which in some cases can affect patient well-being. There are also doctors who speak of logic to the exclusion of emotions, as if our emotions have no validity in critical thinking. Doctors and patients are human beings who possess emotions. Emotions have important functions in life.

What is our understanding of human intelligence and its place in medicine?

The concept of EQ has brought new depth to that understanding.

Human intelligence has been difficult to define. If it encompasses and addresses the emotional, personal, social and survival dimensions of intelligence (which are often more important for daily functioning than the traditional cognitive aspects) then it is far more than logic and reason.

Intelligence (IQ = intelligence quotient) , has traditionally been defined as the capacity to understand, learn, recall, think rationally, solve problems, and apply what one has learned (Kaplan and Sadock, 1991). This capacity has conventionally been measured by cognitive intelligence or IQ

The EQ model puts substance into the “intangible stuff”. Emotional intelligence is concerned with understanding oneself and others, relating to people, and adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings in order to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands.

No-one suggests that EQ (I) will entirely displace or supplant IQ because the two are complementary. It is important to note that you must have a certain baseline IQ to understand what EQ can do for you. You might be smart but if you cannot convey what you know to other people you are in trouble.

**EQ helps to predict success, because it reflects how a person applies knowledge to the immediate situation. EQ is tactical (immediate functioning) while cognitive intelligence (IQ) is strategic (long term capacity). EQ has been shown to be correlated with some of the best measures of emotional functioning such as emotional stability and resilience. Research (Goleman, 1995) also shows EQ influences the quality of leadership and predicts leadership success or derailment.**

## The Interview

You can use the [STAR Model](#) for framing up responses in an interview as well as with Selection Criteria. Do not however just repeat exactly the same information as in your selection criteria.

**Always remember Teamwork, Communication Skills, Time Management, and Problem Solving as the foundations to your desirable qualities.**

You need to convey genuine passion for this specialty in medicine’

Stand out from the crowd in the right way. Ask yourself, ‘What sets me apart from the other candidates?’ Do you have unique or remarkable accomplishments/ strengths but fail to recognize or emphasize in your application or interview?

**Many candidates are compatible with the program, why should they choose you?**

When responding to questions about your deficits (weaknesses) **always** choose those that are not critical to the duties. Present the issue with a follow up statement about your strategies for dealing with the weakness and positive outcome examples.

Choose strengths honestly and be specific not just make a general statement.

Choose strengths that align with the position description

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*“Every response you give to another person involves your intellect and your emotions. The intellect composes the message and the emotions provide animation and grace. The skill to combine intellect and emotion in a powerful fashion is emotional intelligence and it possesses the power to elevate a common exchange from a base level—to something more memorable” Dr. Michael Rock. Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace 2010*

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### **Protocols**

Arrive early, make sure you have allowed time to find a parking space (if applicable). Have a dry run at finding the address and interview room if the venue is new to you.

If you think you will be delayed for any reason (traffic, flight delay), phone and explain as soon as you know the situation. Most interviewers are reasonable.

### **Perceptions/Impressions**

To state the obvious: be well dressed and well groomed. There is no “uniform” for an interview but better to dress more formally rather than too casually even when you know the panel members.

It is about respect and showing that you understand this is a formal situation.

Never become too personal with someone you know on the panel.

Be prepared to shake hands giving eye contact at the same time, taking your cue from the panel.

It is important to be able to walk into a room and project self-confidence through your body language, facial expressions and tone of voice when speaking.

Most people are nervous before and during an interview. It is normal, don't panic. You have prepared well so take a deep breath and remember to smile.

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*Remember that your application and your interview are composed of assessments, achievements, skills, knowledge referrals, professional and personal attributes and your ability to sell yourself effectively.*

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### **References**

The EQ Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Perez & Gati 2013 and 2017 is-- Career Indecision Versus Indecisiveness: Associations with Personality Traits and Emotional Intelligence

The EQ Eric Ravenscroft reference is- Emotional Intelligence: The Social Skills You Weren't Taught in School cited from lifehacker online by Cynthia Gossman 2015

An overall reference is -- The EQ Edge, Emotional Intelligence and Your Success by S.J. Stein and H.E. Book, John Wiley and Sons, 2011

### **Good Luck**

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