

Gloucestershire Local Medical Committee
WORK OBSERVATION / EXPERIENCE GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

Practices are often contacted by schools or school children asking about the possibility of coming to the practice for work experience. These are usually prospective medical students, and may be as young as 15. At the national Conference of LMCs in June 2001 a motion was passed saying that observation of consultations was not appropriate until a student had begun their course at medical school. This is therefore the policy of the General Practitioners Committee. Whilst most medical schools no longer ask applicants about work experience in the general practice setting, exceptions remain. If GPs hear of examples where prospective students have been asked about such experience the LMC should be informed.

The GPC policy gives practices a good reason to decline requests for school students to observe consultations. However, we are aware that some colleagues feel that work observation is of value in helping an interested student to make informed choices. The LMC has therefore formulated guidance that practices are encouraged to use or adapt for their own use.

2. Work observation v work experience

Work observation is when a student spends time observing a doctor's work. It is often called "shadowing" or "work experience". The term work observation will help observers to have realistic expectations of how their time will be spent and to understand that they can only observe doctor's work. They will not be able to participate in any clinical work.

We suggest that the term "work experience" is applied in cases where a student spends time in the office or reception area with no observation of clinical work. Such work experience can be carried out by any suitable student, but we suggest that work observation that involves watching doctors or nurses should be limited to those students who have applied for, or are seriously considering applying for, a medical or nursing career.

Work observation with a GP is only one way for students to get information about a medical career. Various guides, a BMA video called "**A stressful shift**", and a reading list can all be obtained from <http://web.bma.org.uk/homepage.nsf/htmlpagevw/careers>. Volunteering for work in a hospice, nursing home, or day centre may also give the prospective student valuable insights. A practice should therefore not feel pressured into saying yes to a request for a student placement. There are plenty of other opportunities available.

3. Confidentiality

Whether the student is seconded for work experience or work observation, the same rules of confidentiality must be observed. Doctors and practice colleagues:

- Must emphasise the importance of patient confidentiality to students.
- Should make sure that the students are sent information about confidentiality before they begin their placement.

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- Talk to the students about the importance of confidentiality at the start of the attachment.
- Must be satisfied that the student is mature and responsible enough to understand the principles of confidentiality.

We suggest that all students, whether attending for experience or observation, should:

- Be at least 16 years old .
- Be at least in the sixth form of school.
- Have discussed the principles of confidentiality with their teacher.
- Have signed an undertaking of understanding and acceptance of confidentiality principles.

A draft confidentiality agreement is attached to these guidelines, but even if the student signs this the doctor is still ultimately responsible for any breaches.

To reduce potential problems we suggest that work observation takes place outside the student's immediate locality, to reduce the chances of meeting someone they know.

4. Knowing the limits

All staff within the practice need to know and agree the boundaries of the work experience/observation. Students attending for **work experience** should not observe any clinical activity, and should not be asked to carry out any function that would not be delegated to a new untrained receptionist or clerk. They should not be used as chaperones.

Observers should only be present during consultations if patients have given their permission. Ideally this should be in writing. Doctors, or someone they delegate to do the task, must discuss with the patient *prior to the consultation* that someone would like to watch the consultation, but that this requires their consent. The patient needs to be told who the observer is, in case the patient knows the observer, and why they want to observe. The patient needs time to consider this and they should be made to feel that there is no undue pressure for them to agree. Doctors need to make sure that the patient understands that they can ask the observer to leave at any point in the consultation without prejudice to their treatment.

A notice should be placed in the waiting room informing patients of the fact that a student is present within the practice on work observation, but that they will only be present in the consultation with the express permission of the patient. Doctors must still speak to each patient prior to a consultation even if a notice is used.

Observers should not be involved in any clinical tasks, such as minor operations. Care should also be taken to protect observers from witnessing traumatic events, without prior warning.

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MODEL CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I understand that information received about patients held by this practice is confidential and that this confidentiality is permanent. I have received education and training on this matter.

I have read and understood the practice policy on confidentiality, and agree to be bound by its terms. I undertake not to disclose personal information learnt in the course of my presence in the practice to anybody outside the practice. If I feel disclosure is necessary in the public, patient or family interest, I will discuss this with the appropriate health professional.

I understand that a breach of this obligation may result in my work observation being terminated and that other appropriate action may be taken.

Signed _____
Date _____
Name _____

Address _____

Countersignature of parent, teacher or careers adviser:

I have discussed the principles of this document with the above named and can recommend the student as a suitable person to attend the practice.

Signed _____
Date _____
Name _____

Relationship to student _____

Address _____