

*Making Everything Easier!™*

# **Get into UK Medical School**

FOR  
**DUMMIES®**

## **Learn to:**

- Choose the schools that are right for you
- Create a winning personal statement
- Prepare for the UKCAT, BMAT and GAMSAT
- Put your best foot forward in the interview

**Dr Chris Chopdar**  
**Dr Neel Burton**

*Founders and directors of  
Get into Medical School*



# Get into UK Medical School For Dummies®

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**[www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/getintomedschooluk](http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/getintomedschooluk) to view this book's cheat sheet.**

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Cheat Sheet

# ***Get into UK Medical School For Dummies<sup>®</sup>***

## **by Dr Chris Chopdar and Dr Neel Burton**



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# Introduction

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So, you want to be a doctor. Great – clearly you love a challenge! Medicine is an exciting and varied career with interesting science underpinning clinical practice. Doctors meet a wide cross-section of society and help people through difficult times. The job can be tough, but it's also very rewarding when approached positively.

The first stage of your career is to prove to medical schools that you deserve the chance of training with them. Universities want to know that you're committed to a career in medicine and that you have a solid grasp of its rewards and challenges. They need to be certain that you can cope with the tough and unrelenting academic challenge of completing a medical degree, and they work hard to ensure that successful candidates have strong ethical awareness and good communication skills.

These varied demands mean that the application and selection process is dauntingly long and can sometimes be very frustrating. In fact, the prospect of this marathon application puts off a number of otherwise excellent candidates. So to study medicine, you need not only to have a broad range of skills, but also to be sufficiently motivated to put yourself through the application process. If you follow our advice and take things one step at a time, you can make things much easier for yourself and, hopefully, fulfill your dream of becoming a doctor.

We've been helping people get into medical school for many years. As doctors ourselves, we understand what medical schools require (and what medicine requires!), and ensure that our students know what they should be including on their applications. We also guide them through the selection tests that they face, such as the UKCAT (United Kingdom Clinical

Aptitude Test) and the BMAT (Bio-Medical Admissions Test), and then help them to prepare for their interviews.

This book gives you the benefit of our accumulated experience. If you've got the talent and are prepared to put in the work, you should be well on your way to getting into medical school.

## About This Book

We really want you to get into medical school; otherwise we'd have chosen a different title for this book! *Get into UK Medical School For Dummies* is aimed at intelligent, motivated people who quickly want to get to grips with a career in medicine and how to apply successfully to UK medical schools. We make this task as easy as possible, breaking down the various parts of the application process into short chapters and sections.

As well as teaching prospective medical school applicants, we're also psychiatrists and we leverage that background to show you some techniques to present yourself in the best light and cope with the stresses of the application process. These approaches help you apply successfully, and fortify you for the challenges of medical school and beyond.

In this book you find:

- ✔ Information on medicine as a career.
- ✔ What medical schools are looking for and how to acquire these skills.
- ✔ How to choose a medical school.
- ✔ How to apply to medical schools.
- ✔ How to write a compelling personal statement.

- ✔ Strategy guides and sample questions for the extra tests you may face: the UKCAT, BMAT and GAMSAT (Graduate Australian Medical School Admissions Test).
- ✔ Help on interview skills, including commonly asked questions and how to answer them.
- ✔ Some broader tips and strategies to help you navigate the sometimes confusing world of medical school applications.

## Conventions Used in This Book

We don't use any strange conventions in this book. We write and arrange it as straightforwardly as possible, so that you can focus on the content. Having said that, here are a few basic conventions to be aware of:

- ✔ We use *italics* to highlight important words.
- ✔ We use **bold text** on crucial keywords in lists and to indicate correct answers in answer sections.
- ✔ We use this font for web addresses. Keep in mind that some addresses can be long, extending over two lines of text. Just ignore the line break when typing them out.
- ✔ We use the terms *applicant*, *candidate* and *student* interchangeably, and we do the same with *medical school*, *institution* and *university*.

## What You're Not to Read

You can skip anything in sidebars – grey boxes with text in them – if you're in a rush. These boxes give you extra background information or relate a light-hearted anecdote. Taking

occasional short breaks as you study is a good thing, however, and reading these sidebars helps you do just that.

## **Foolish Assumptions**

Anyone who writes a book has to make some assumptions about the readers. In this book we assume that you want to apply to a UK university in order to study medicine. Some aspects of this process are the same in any country, and so you get some benefit even if you're applying elsewhere, but the bulk of this book is built around the assumption that you're applying to UK medical schools.

We also assume that you're prepared to put in some work. Little in life is handed to you on a plate and a place at medical school is no exception. If you want it, you need to invest time and effort.

We should mention that the sample questions we provide in this book are designed for revising applicants, to help them acquire the skills needed to answer a range of potential questions. The questions aren't designed to be used by test administrators. Also, this book focuses on an overview of the entire medical school application process so there isn't space to provide large numbers of questions for each exam. You will need to do many more practice questions than are contained here and we advise you on useful sources for these in the relevant chapters.

## **How This Book Is Organised**

We divide this book into four parts to make the information more manageable. Most of the divisions are self-explanatory,

but the information in this section helps you quickly identify the part you're looking for.

## **Part I: Targeting Medical School**

This part introduces you to a career in medicine and how to choose and apply to medical schools. In Chapter 1 we sketch out the pros and cons of studying medicine and being a doctor. We also give you some pointers about what kind of person tends to be successful in applying to medical school. Perhaps more importantly, we think about what kind of person makes a happy, successful doctor.

In Chapter 2 we help you choose between the UK medical schools. We describe the points of difference between universities and the current funding situation in the UK. Chapter 3 provides a clear timeline for the application cycle, incorporating all the various hurdles in your way. We also point out the specific challenges that graduate and international applicants have to deal with.

Chapter 4 covers academic and non-academic entry requirements, explaining the importance of extracurricular activities and work experience. Chapter 5 is all about writing a strong personal statement for your application form. The personal statement is crucial to the shortlisting process, and so it pays dividends to focus on creating an excellent text.

## **Part II: Sitting the Tests**

The chapters in this part describe the extra selection tests that many universities require candidates to take. In Chapter 6 we explain the UKCAT, including how and when to apply, and review its structure and timings. Chapter 7 contains a small

selection of sample questions. (You can find many more practice questions in our companion book, *UKCAT For Dummies*.)

Chapters 8 and 9 review the BMAT and provide a selection of sample questions, respectively, and Chapter 10 covers the GAMSAT format.

## **Part III: Preparing for Interviews**

This part explains the importance of interviews to the selection process and prepares you for the questions you may encounter. Chapter 11 discusses interview technique, including controlling body language and tone of voice, and Chapter 12 reviews the most common interview questions along with strategies on how to answer them effectively.

Chapter 13 contains an overview of the UK's healthcare system and some of the current challenges facing it, as well as discussing some common ethical quandaries that clinicians come across. The vast majority of newly qualified doctors commence practice in the NHS (National Health Service) and many work their entire careers in it. Medical interviewers are keen to ensure that students are going to be capable of working within its structures and so frequently ask about current controversies and the medical ethical issues that arise. This chapter prepares you for these questions.

In Chapter 14 is information on your next steps after an interview, including how to choose between offers and prepare for life at medical school. We also assess your options if you don't receive any offers.

## **Part IV: The Part of Tens**

Every *For Dummies* book comes with a Part of Tens: sets of concise tips designed to boost your productivity. We focus on strategies to help you stand out from the crowd of applicants in Chapter 15 and provide tips to cope with the stress of applying in Chapter 16.

## Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, we use icons in the margins that flag up important information. Here's what they mean:



This icon highlights the most important information and insights in the book. We suggest you read this material carefully.



Anyone can look up facts; our experience gives you strategic shortcuts to simplify your approach to the application process. We mark these hints in the text with this icon.



Selection processes for medical school can be tricky. This icon flags up potential pitfalls that many candidates fall into. Avoiding these mistakes dramatically improves your odds of success.



Some aspects of the selection process are underpinned by a lot of research and testing. You don't need to know this in order to get in, but understanding just why people are asking you to do things can sometimes be useful. This icon marks these explanations.



Beside this icon we include some quick exercises to make this book as practically useful for you as possible. We design them to help you get ahead of the competition, especially in areas that many candidates find tricky.

## Where to Go from Here

You can read this book cover to cover for a full overview of how to get into medical school or cherry-pick those parts and chapters that address the bits you're most worried about. If you need to get on with your UCAS personal statement, turn straight to Chapter 5 now for some invaluable guidelines; if your UKCAT is fast approaching, revise the content of Chapters 6 and 7; or if you have a looming medical school interview, Part III is waiting for you to check that you're not missing anything vital.

The choice is yours; the book's structure is flexible enough to be used whichever way meets your needs the best.

For more about applying to medical school in general, further resources are on our own website ([www.getintomedicalschool.org](http://www.getintomedicalschool.org)). And for updates about the application process (relevant dates, contact information, and so on) and changes to the tests visit us at [www.dummies.com/go/getintoukmedicalschool](http://www.dummies.com/go/getintoukmedicalschool).



We both wish you the very best of luck in your future career. And remember, one day we may be under your medical care, and so we have every interest in making sure that talented students succeed and get into medical school!

# Part I

## Targeting Medical School



"And if you can't get enough funding from the State, there's always other sources."

### In this part...

Part I is about getting to grips with the challenge of applying to medical school. The application process seems long and tiresome but breaking it down into smaller chunks makes it much easier to digest.

Your first step is making a positive choice to become a doctor. Then you need to choose some medical schools, successfully complete your application and meet the academic requirements. On top of all this, you need to get the right sort of work experience to complement your extracurricular activities in demonstrating your commitment and aptitude for medicine.

The chapters in this part cover each of these steps in turn, culminating in a chapter on how to write your application to present yourself in the best possible light.

## **Chapter 1**

# **Deciding whether to Study Medicine**

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### ***In This Chapter***

- ▶ Understanding the pros and cons of a career in medicine
  - ▶ Discovering whether you have the necessary qualities
  - ▶ Introducing the UK's medical schools
- 

Medicine is unique. Life as a doctor is intensely rewarding and satisfying. At times, it's demanding and stressful. Applying to, and studying at medical school parallels these highs and lows. It's the start of a great adventure.

When thinking about a career as a doctor, you need to ask yourself whether you have what it takes to get into medical school and, perhaps even more importantly, whether you possess the necessary qualities to be a great doctor. In this chapter, we give you the information you need to answer these two crucial questions. We also introduce you to the system of UK medical schools and training, and onto starting your career as a doctor.

## **Working as a Doctor**

Medicine is one of the most privileged professions to follow – as well as one of the most challenging. Applying to medical school is a serious decision. To be a good candidate, you need to understand the rewards and risks of being a doctor and make a balanced, mature decision that devoting yourself to a medical career is what you really want from life.

To help, we go through the positive and negative aspects of modern medicine, with a focus on UK practice, so you appreciate what you're getting yourself into.

## **Knowing the benefits**

Medicine has a lot going for it as a career. It's enjoyable and the skills you learn are invaluable and highly transferable. In this section, we present some of the many upsides.

### **Enjoying the variety**

Although some basic scheduling is involved – such as fitting professional activities around outpatient clinics and perhaps managing ward patients in hospital – one of the best aspects is the sheer variety and excitement of everyday life as a doctor. The people you see and what you do on any given day vary enormously and you meet an entire cross-section of humanity. That unpredictability is challenging but fun, and lends a certain buzz to a day's work.

You get to adapt to different situations, too, and the very act of helping other people can be highly rewarding. Dr Cox, the acerbic physician on TV's *Scrubs*, jokes that 'all doctors are praise addicts' and a kernel of truth lurks in that statement. Mind you, we'd rephrase it to say that 'doctors enjoy doing a task well, and few tasks are more worthy than being able to help when no one else can'.

Not as punchy a line, admittedly!

### **Relishing plenty of career options**

As with many professional jobs, doctors are responsible for keeping their skills up to date and checking that their practice meets the best standards, as well as investigating and deciding

upon the best way to do things. These educational, developmental, management and research or audit roles form part of a doctor's week and many medics enjoy these activities. Some doctors enjoy them so much that they form the bulk of their working lives. For example, academically-focused doctors work as university lecturers and researchers. Other doctors choose to work in the private sector, perhaps as a clinician or doing research and liaison work with pharmaceutical companies. Others still opt to work for charities, in their home country or internationally.

Some medics work on hospital management boards and in conjunction with the Department of Health or other political and lobbying organisations. A few doctors even run for elected office!



A career in medicine offers such a wide variety of potential roles that you're almost certain to identify a niche you love. Of course, getting that ideal job can be difficult but the opportunities certainly exist.

## Recognising other benefits

Although doctors don't like to talk about them much, other slightly more selfish plus points apply to being a doctor. But they're an important part of people's lives, and so we need to talk about them openly and honestly:

- ✓ **Money:** Sadly, very few doctors end up fabulously wealthy. If you want bags of money, medicine isn't the right career for you; may we suggest hedge-fund management instead? However, medicine generally offers a very comfortable income.