

Writing your medical CV

Focused and full of evidence—**Laura Brammar** from the BMA's careers service tells you how to write a CV that works

Although recruitment to most medical posts is increasingly carried out using application forms, a curriculum vitae (CV) is still used by some trusts for shortlisting or at interview stage and indeed for many general practitioner posts. Beyond that, the actual process of effectively analysing your skills and achievements and then presenting these succinctly on a CV can be a valuable exercise in itself. It can also be seen as a useful resource that can then be referred to when completing application forms.

What's the point?

The purpose of any CV, within or beyond medicine, is essentially to present relevant information about you to a prospective employer. At its most basic, your CV is your personalised response to the job description or person specification for the specific role that you are applying for. In other words, your CV is your part of the matching process that complements the outline of the job provided by the employer.

This is why it's important to keep your CV up to date and to an extent flexible. Depending on the specific post for which you are applying, you may choose to emphasise some aspects of your experience or training over others. For this reason, it is important to review your CV for each job you are using it for, rather than attach the same old version time and time again.

Below are some suggestions to help you to produce the best CV you can.

Evidence based CVs

Being able to provide evidence of skills and abilities is vital in order to produce an excellent CV. To be selected for a job you need to convince the selectors that you have the full range of skills that they are looking for. It is not enough to simply list your experience; instead you need to provide examples of when you have used the core skills required for the post. Many applicants fail to provide the best example of the highlighted skill as the information gets lost in a long chronological record of previous roles and rotations. Take time to assess your range of experience from the perspective of specific skill sets—for example, team working, and then use this analysis to emphasise certain skills on your CV.

Imagine you're the selector

Keep in mind that idea of matching your CV to an actual person specification; the selectors are looking for X, Y, and Z and you have experience and evidence of X, Y, and Z. Remember that a CV is not just a record of your life from your perspective; it is a summary of how you can provide the skills and experience required by the role and the employer. For example, if a general practice states it is looking for evidence of managerial experience, think how you might emphasise that on your CV. It can sometimes even help to highlight the skills in the same order as they have outlined them on the person specification, if appropriate; if they have prioritised X, Y, Z, does it make sense to illustrate Z, Y, X on your CV? Relevance is the key determinant here, so structure your CV around that as a way to attract the attention of the selectors.

Useful running order

Regardless of how you shape your CV to match a particular job description, you will still need a range of sections to provide enough information on your experience and skills. Below is an outline of the common sections, in order, found on a medical CV as well as some advice about what you might include in each section:

- Personal details
- Career statement
- Education and qualifications
- Present position
- Career history (ensure that any gaps in employment are accounted for)
- Clinical skills and experience
- Management and leadership experience
- Referees.

Personal details

- Name
- Contact details—telephone; email
- General Medical Council registration number and national training number
- Medical Defence Union number.

Although of course it is your choice, there is no need to put personal information such as your date of birth, marital status, or gender on a CV as this information is irrelevant to whether or not you are shortlisted for a post.

Education and qualifications

- University (medical degree, awards, prizes and scholarships, intercalated degree)
- School (A levels and O levels or GCSEs).

Career statement

This should be a short statement of the direction in which you want to develop, which is explicitly linked to the post. Try to avoid generic statements about wanting to become a consultant or general practitioner principal, or vague assertions of your skills. Focus on the goals that you have for yourself in certain aspects of your professional life and keep it short and simple.

Current appointment

State your current role, including date started. Consider including some brief information on your core skills or responsibilities within the role, again illustrating them in an order or sequence that is most suitable for the new role.

Previous employment

Include all dates, roles, and a brief summary of skills or achievements.

Evidence of experience and achievements

You may sometimes find it useful to divide your experience into two sections—"Relevant experience" and "Additional experience." As long as you include the dates and account for each year, you don't need to list everything in chronological order—remember, relevance is key.

Furthermore, it is often useful to organise your experience under appropriate headings—teaching, management, research, publications, audits, presentations

Interests

The word "hobbies" is used less and less on professional CVs so stick to "interests." Try not to just list your interests randomly. You may be able to batch your interests under subheadings—for example, music, travel. Also try to demonstrate how they enabled you to develop qualities that will improve your ability as a doctor. Leisure

activities, particularly organised ones where you took a major part, can often develop the qualities you will need for your clinical roles, which may include leadership, for example.

Referees

Always secure agreement from your proposed referees before listing their details on your CV, and provide them with a job description and recent CV to help them to write a focused reference.

Additional advice on content

Beyond the detail of the CV, remember to use positive language and aim for a confident tone. Take care with dates and make sure any gaps are accounted for. As well as listing facts, consider adding some interpretation of the skills that you have developed. When describing apparently non-relevant experience, try to point out the relevance of the non-clinical skills you have acquired. The amount of space you spend on a topic indicates the weight you want the employer to give it. Devote more space if the topic is important: if it isn't as relevant, don't dwell on it.

Trained abroad?

Essentially, the structure of your CV should follow that outlined above. You may wish to prioritise your UK medical work experience, however, and include details of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB). Think carefully about the skills you gained in posts elsewhere and how you might present these succinctly to future employers.

Additional advice on layout

Using a word processor makes it easy to try out different layouts and fonts. Remember, font size should be between 10 and 12 for clarity and readability. Traditionally there has been no limit to the length of a medical CV, but they are becoming increasingly more focused and therefore shorter, to an extent. Remember that the aim of a CV is to convince a recruiter that you have what they are looking for so pages of irrelevant information will be less likely to impress than a concise presentation of your achievements to date.

Equally, your CV should look neat and tidy with all the information easy to find. There are conventions for a medical CV as outlined above so don't be too creative with style and layout. When using a word processor, use capitals and bold print to separate out different sections. Bold print and italics can be useful to highlight important points. Underlining should probably be avoided, as it can give a CV a rather old fashioned look.

Take a step back

Once you have drafted and redrafted your CV and after you have experimented with different margin widths and fonts, make sure you leave it for a while and go back to the job description. Once again, put yourself in the selectors' shoes and try objectively to compare your CV with a job description for the post. Be brutal and ask yourself if you have effectively shown your suitability for the role? If you were looking at the CV what might be the first question you might ask the candidate? Have you demonstrated your ability to do the job and have a life outside of medicine? Is it neat and tidy? What impression does it give? Is it clear and logical, so that information is easy to find?

Top tips

- Be concise—Too much information is off-putting and difficult to assimilate
- Be consistent—Adopt a format and stick to it. If you put one job title in bold, all job titles should be in bold
- Think about the job, and who will be reading the CV. What will the reader be interested in?
- Personal details—Stick to contact details; you do not need to give genuinely personal information such as date of birth, marital status, etc.
- Always include dates, and aim for most recent first, but remember you may divide into "relevant experience" and "additional experience"
- Avoid bland, generic statements about skills
- Give evidence of the skills that you want to highlight. Make it clear what you achieved in each job.

If not, reflect on what else you could add or emphasise to achieve these aims.

Finally, give your CV a final spell check and read it through carefully yourself. The spell checker will not pick out mistakes that are real words in their own right.

Covering letter

Unless explicitly told not to, it is best practice to accompany your CV with a brief covering letter. Use the covering letter to briefly introduce yourself and summarise the main points you hope will attract the employer.

Want more individual help?

The BMA careers service works with medics who are looking for individual one to one advice on ways to strengthen their CV or applications to particular posts. We also work with doctors on improving their interview techniques by providing a tailor-made practice interview service with questions focused on your application and experience. Alternatively, some of our individual clients visit us to discuss their long term career direction within medicine or explore alternatives beyond the medical field. Visit the BMA site at www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/Hubcareersadvicefordoctors.

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