

Learning portfolio: how to get it right

Introduction

Nowadays, there are new and different selection criteria for a Specialist Training post. Deaneries are increasingly asking for the learning portfolio as part of the evaluation process in the final selection process and the learning portfolio accounts for up to one third of your final score in some deaneries. So, having an excellent portfolio can mean a lot to the progression of your career. This article gives an easy guide to help you get your portfolio right.

You need to make an early start as this is not an overnight job, but requires days if not months to do. Start by knowing what to include in your portfolio, then how to collect all required data, and finally to know how to prepare and organize it in a good-looking portfolio.

Contents of the portfolio

So, what do I need to include in my portfolio? The answer is in your portfolio itself. You should receive a learning portfolio from the educational department at your hospital within the first 2 weeks of starting your new job. Listen carefully to what is required from you in the introductory meeting. The educational advisor should go over the entire portfolio with you and give a rough idea of what is required from you in this portfolio.

You then need to start reading it. You may need to read it more than once until you familiarize yourself with all of its contents. It is important to ensure that you

have a complete list of the information you need to include in your portfolio before starting to collect it. If you do not do this, you may miss something out and not be able to add it to your portfolio retrospectively. Do this before going to the second step.

Data collection

Your second step in building an excellent portfolio is to start collecting data. This is a very important and time-consuming process. You need to give yourself plenty of time for this. Ask yourself who should I ask to sign my forms, when should I ask, and what should I ask? You need to be selective in choosing the right people. You definitely need to include your consultant and registrar, but may ask others as well. Sometimes it is helpful to speak with them beforehand and arrange a time and place that is convenient for both of you. For example, you could inform your consultant beforehand that you want to do a case-based discussion (CBD) or mini-clinical evaluation exercise (mini-CEX) in the outpatients clinic. The consultant can then arrange to shorten the clinic, giving you more time for discussing the case and filling in the reports.

Additionally, it is a good idea to keep extra forms while you are on-call. You may be required to perform a specific procedure urgently while on call and it is very handy to have the right form with you at the right time and place. As far as what to ask depends on what is required from you in your portfolio. You need to include, for example, signed and completed forms, including your direct observation of procedures (DOPS), mini-CEX, CBD, peer

assessment tool (PAT), log book and many other forms.

Organizing your portfolio

Once all the data are collected, you need to think about how to organize them. At this stage of building your portfolio, keep one thing in your mind: 'my learning portfolio must sell me for my next job'. It must look good and impress the interview panellists while they are looking at it. Your portfolio needs to make them think that 'This is the right person for this job.' But how do you do this? Be creative! It is a good idea, for example, to have a big smart folder, include every document in a plastic cover sheet, include a list of contents at the beginning of your portfolio with corresponding page number and so on. The interview panellists may not all have the time to read your entire portfolio line by line, but if it is well organized, it makes their job a lot easier and might be the reason you secure your next job.

Conclusions

Do not forget to ask your educational supervisor or programme director to look at your portfolio from time to time, especially before attending an interview. It must be up to date and include all necessary documentation and signatures. Never wait till the last minute to collect the information you need as this causes chaos and can cause you a lot of stress and confusion. You need to continuously upgrade your portfolio as you progress in your career to ensure it is always up to date. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

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KEY POINTS

- The learning portfolio is becoming an increasingly important piece of documentation in the final selection process for medical jobs.
- It is important to know what to include in your portfolio, give yourself plenty of time to collect all the information and make sure that you organize it in a professional manner.
- Your educational supervisor should have a look at your portfolio particularly before you attend an interview.