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WHAT THEY DON'T TEACH YOU AT MEDICAL SCHOOL

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a practical guide**

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How to improve your curriculum vitae

Introduction

Competition for posts in higher specialist training (and thereafter consultant posts) is increasing, with an emphasis on specializing down a particular path at an earlier stage. Producing and maintaining a high quality curriculum vitae (CV) is an important step in getting shortlisted for interviews. Of course, there is an application form to complete before any interview but there is a requirement to bring the CV along and it will have been assessed in any shortlisting process. This article gives some tips to aspiring applicants for posts at specialist registrar level but also contains transferable useful tips for existing higher specialist trainees seeking to format their CV for consultant posts.

Background

The suggestions made in this article reflect an accumulation of the best advice the author has been given by many former mentors from the last 25 years and the author's own reflections. The author's previous editorial background and role have also contributed to design recommendations. The recommendations in this article are suggestions only and are no guarantee of success as the content of the CV is also important but it is hoped the reader finds them a useful structure or framework for CV construction.

Why bother maintaining a CV?

A CV (in various forms) still has several important functions despite the fact that application forms are usually required for higher specialist training and more senior posts now. These functions are as follows:

1. Job applications and career progression (to enable your referee to complete a reference, shortlisting and discussion points during interview)

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2. Revalidation (record of achievements)
3. Application for other internal or external roles (usually at consultant level), e.g. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Royal college, national societies, trust management
4. To begin involvement with research or clinical trials (usually a shortened CV).

Tip 1: avoid procrastination, maintain an up-to-date CV

It is often very difficult to recall all your achievements and decide what is important or redundant. It can be difficult to recall all significant accomplishments if leaving applications to the last minute. In addition, referees are likely to need a CV to complete your reference. The author therefore recommends keeping a running version of your CV and editing it after each post or significant achievement. This saves the applicant a lot of heartache and discomfort when trying to pull together a CV at short notice.

Tip 2: a well-structured CV is no substitute for lack of content

A very well-structured CV will improve the overall impression of the CV as a whole but a lack of content cannot be resolved by better layout alone. There needs to be adequate content (e.g. achievements) to put down. If lack of content is a concern now, the reader would be better to focus on developing his/her activities and achievements for inclusion on the CV and then worrying about the layout later.

Tip 3: less is often more

Many CVs have a lot of very good content that is hidden away because there is often too much material in the CV hiding the very good material. Conversely, a well-structured CV with good content can be doubly impressive for content and impact.

For example, an international research conference poster presentation is impressive, making the candidate potentially stand out with a 'unique selling point' (USP), but less so if surrounded by several less impressive local journal club meetings.

Tip 4: develop your own USP

Therefore, decide what your own USP is and what are your own personal distinguishing achievements. For example, membership of a local, regional or national quality improvement committee or a quality improvement project conference presentation would strengthen the candidate's quality improvement USP as a quality improvement champion. If you have no USP, then the reader should be aiming to develop his/her activities/achievements for inclusion on their CV with this in mind rather than worrying about the layout of their CV at this stage (see above).

Developing and nurturing your USP becomes even more important at more senior level interviews but is an important principle to establish early. Tailoring the USP to the job specification is also helpful, to order to ensure that all essential and as many desirable characteristics are met, and becomes of increasing importance in more senior posts.

Tip 5: be honest

You need to be completely honest about any achievement on your CV. For example, it is not acceptable to write a publication down unless it is either published or in press (in which case the doi number should be included); papers that have been just submitted should not be included. Content will be checked and if there are false claims this could be regarded as a probity issue which will not be favourably received. Potential employers have been known to speak to previous employers.

Tip 6: use a professional font and quality paper

Use a professional font. Unlike PowerPoint presentations, where sans serif fonts are essential and serif fonts inadvisable, either would be acceptable for CVs (Figure 1). Times New Roman, Cambria or Bookman Old Style are popular serif fonts that give a professional appearance. Arial, Gill Sans MT and Calibri are commonly used sans

Figure 1. Recommended fonts for a CV.

Serif	Sans serif
Times New Roman	Arial
Cambria	Calibri
Bookman Old Style	Gill Sans MT

serif font that are very readable, but still have a professional look. Of all these Times New Roman and Arial are the favoured two. Using 11–12 point font size is recommended (10 point is too small, 14 point is too large) with minimum 1.5-line spacing and justification for clarity. Page numbering is essential but it is also recommended to use the footer 'Curriculum Vitae, Dr AB, page C of D' (Figure 2) in case one page gets lost and the set can be restored together.

Adequate quality paper makes a significant difference to the finished appearance of your CV and should be considered: 100 g/m² or 115 g/m² would be preferable to 80 g/m² of A4 size.

Tip 7: use a title page and table of contents

Having a title page is recommended (Figure 2). A table of contents becomes increasingly important and useful as the CV gets longer with more senior applications. For example, a consultant CV might be 25 pages long but for higher specialist training posts, lengths of 8–12 pages might be more expected. A suggested structure is shown in Figure 3. For more senior positions, a 1-page executive summary outlining the applicant's USP as well as illustrating the three A's (ability, affability and availability) is recommended. This is not usually required for more junior positions but a short section on career aims and objectives is encouraged.

Figure 2. Recommended layout and font size of title page (note footer too).

CURRICULUM VITAE

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March 2013

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Tip 8: use a professional email address for personal details

This section needs to contain a professional email address, e.g. xxx.nhs.net or xxx.nhs.uk or xxx.doctors.org.uk or xxx.ac.uk but not yahoo or hotmail (hotmail and yahoo are not regarded as professional

Figure 3. Suggested structure for table of contents page. *For consultant posts, an executive summary is usually included after the title page before anything else but not necessary for more junior positions. †These sections may not always be includable but are desirable to demonstrate if possible.

Personal details*
Education, qualifications and awards
Employment history
Summary of clinical training
Clinical governance and audit
Management and service development
Teaching
Information technology
Research†
Publications†
Presentations
Postgraduate courses
Personal interests
Referees

email addresses, which is not a positive reflection on the candidate, and also are potentially less secure regarding virus corruption so professional email addresses are recommended). *Figure 4* shows the essential items. It is good practice to begin developing a continuing professional development diary which can be invaluable for revalidation.

Tip 9: education, qualifications and awards: be selective and strategic

Qualifications at school (e.g. O and A levels, GCSEs) become less important with time and degrees and diplomas are the important items to list. Additional qualifications can be mentioned too, e.g. Advanced Life Support, educational qualifications or computer literacy. Professional affiliations should be mentioned too, e.g. Royal colleges or specialist society which can help to show a commitment to the specialty. For example, someone applying for a respiratory training programme might put down membership of the British Thoracic Society.

Awards might include travel awards bestowed by either colleges or specialist societies to present a quality improvement or research project at a conference. This can help demonstrate commitment and ability in research or quality improvement and help form the USP (see Tip 4). Awards will also include prizes for presentations at

Figure 4. Essential items for personal details page.
*These are optional or only apply to consultant posts.

Age/date of birth
Nationality/place of birth
Address (permanent)
Driving licence (clean, advanced)
Email address (nhs.net, NHS trust, university, drs.net acceptable, avoid hotmail, yahoo)
Telephone number (department secretary, bleep, home)
Fax number (department secretary)
General Medical Council number and registration status/date
Medical indemnity cover and number
Continuing professional development diary number*
Certificate of Completion of Training date*

local, regional, national and international conferences or perhaps NHS awards for quality improvement projects.

Tip 10: be succinct but accurate with the employment history

A common mistake is to put a huge amount of text about each previous post. It is important to demonstrate no significant gaps in previous training (or be able to account for them with good reason). Therefore, accuracy in recording start and completion dates of previous posts is important. In general, more text should be included about more recent (and senior posts) with much less description of earlier posts. Educational supervisors should be named for each post and anything unique in terms of experience gained from a particular post should be included.

Tip 11: consider having a summary of clinical experience

It is very helpful to have a summary page showing, for example, total experience of general medicine and period of time in years of on call and at what grade; this also reduces the amount of text required for the employment history. On the same page, a summary of procedural competency can also be placed, for example: 'I am competent in chest drain insertion, pleural aspiration, lumbar puncture and central line insertion'. Numbers of each procedure do not need to be specified here but should be kept on log books or e-portfolios in case asked about. When coming to apply for consultant posts, competency is assumed but a further summary page of specialist experience is usually added (if applying to a specialist post).

Tip 12: demonstrate examples of clinical governance

Clinical governance remains a very important concept often asked about at interview. Although clinical audit has generally been replaced by the term quality improvement, it is important to demonstrate the reason for the quality improvement project, what was found and what intervention took place with 'closure of the audit loop' and the results of that. Demonstrating all the phases of a quality improvement project once is far more impressive than several unfinished projects.

You should also demonstrate how you engage with continuing professional development (using a continuing professional development diary is a good example), clinical effectiveness, research and development implementation (involvement in refining trust guidelines to reflect new research is a good example), information technology, electronic innovations in health care (e.g. tele-health or electronic post-take ward round activities) and risk management (participation in morbidity and mortality meetings or reporting a critical incident would be examples).

Tip 13: show evidence of service development or management activity

It is possible to play an important role in either enhancing a service or developing it in more junior medical positions, although there are more possibilities with increasing seniority. For example, you might have contributed to helping a senior colleague in generating a business case for a new service.

Managerial experience can be obtained by acting as a junior doctor representative, e.g. in organizing journal clubs, rota management, or on college committees. It is important to highlight any personal achievements in such positions. Completion of quality improvement projects and implementation of interventions is further evidence of managerial activity which might also involve service improvement.

Tip 14: include evaluation in examples of teaching

Teaching is an important component to demonstrate in any CV. The most commonly forgotten aspect is to show evidence of evaluation in teaching and how teaching methods are changed as result of this rather than multiple examples of teaching without evaluation. Showing different teaching styles in different contexts can illustrate a versatility of style. Teaching qualifications or courses can provide evidence of training in someone whose USP might be educational in the longer term.

Tip 15: show evidence of information technology skills

In the 21st century, with smart phones, tablets and endless applications, computer literacy has never been more necessary.

Completion of an internationally recognized qualification such as the European Computer Driving Licence (www.ecdl.com/) is a simple way of demonstrating competency. Others may have helped redesign websites about care pathways or clinical guidelines, and these are good examples of service enhancement, managerial or quality improvement activity and IT skills. Others may have maintained clinical databases or developed online educational material for examinations.

Tip 16: highlight any research experience

Some will have completed an intercalated honours degree or a minority a PhD even at this stage which may have led to some publications already. This is a great opportunity to distinguish yourself from others. Others may have presented at conferences which may have led to publication in an abstract conference book. Others may have published a quality improvement project or a case report, or helped write a review or a book chapter. Publications should be ordered in terms of importance and then chronology, as in *Table 1*.

Any research posts undertaken, theses and research degrees should be mentioned. Research techniques and grants may also be relevant if the post applied for is more academic. Presentations can also be listed at this point but should not duplicate abstract publications.

Tip 17: be selective, don't put too many postgraduate courses down

There is a temptation to include as many courses as possible in the hope that this may impress. Putting down too many

Table 1. Recommended hierarchy for publications

Peer-reviewed scientific original articles
Quality improvement studies
Reviews, systematic reviews or meta-analyses
Case reports
Book chapters or commissioned papers
Letters to the Editor
Conference abstracts: scientific, clinical
Rapid responses

courses on one page can give the unintended impression that the candidate is seldom at work (see Tip 3). It is more advisable to put down a small number of appropriate courses, e.g. Advanced Life Support or teaching that are useful to most and any specific for your planned specialty, e.g. in respiratory medicine, a thoracic ultrasound course is part of the requirement for level 1 competency (Royal College of Radiologists, 2012) and this shows commitment and planning ahead of time.

Tip 18: the interests section is a chance to really shine

It is essential that the candidate shows something of his/her own human side and qualities in the interests section. There is a real opportunity here to support one's USP by showing what the candidate can achieve away from medicine but also impresses more if the examples or achievements can be linked to generic skills, e.g. setting up a charity or undertaking voluntary work showing teamworking, leadership or creative skills. It is not an option to leave this section blank. This section can often lead to an interesting discussion in the interview.

Tip 19: keep in touch with your referees and keep them up to date

It is important to have at least three referees in total from current and previous posts. With time, it will become necessary to change referees. It is important to include their correct title, telephone number, fax and email details (which often change). It is also wise to have approached the referees to confirm that they are indeed happy to write a reference and also to send them your up-to-date CV every so often.

It is sensible to let them know in advance if you are planning to apply for jobs as references are often asked for very quickly via email now and this can be problematic if your referee is on annual leave for 2 weeks. The type of referee might be influenced by the type of post; for example, an academic post might require at least one academic referee.

Tip 20: keep a backup and get someone to check it

Please keep at least two backups on a USB flash drive or portable storage device to avoid the heartache of a broken computer or lost drive. Portable USB drives also allow easy updating when at work or on the hop. Use a spell checker, get a friend to proof read it and show it to your educational supervisor if possible or other senior colleague for advice.

Conclusions

Writing and maintaining an up-to-date CV is an essential task for all doctors at all stages. Trying to do it all at the last minute is not advisable. Using the 20 tips in this article should help the reader to get the most out of his/her CV to create a positive impact and improve the chances of short-listing. A carefully structured CV, however, is no substitute for lack of content and does not guarantee a successful interview either but should be regarded as one of the essential cogs in the wheel of career progression in medicine. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

Royal College of Radiologists (2012) Ultrasound training recommendations for medical and surgical specialties. Second Edition. [http://www.rcr.ac.uk/docs/radiology/pdf/BFCR\(12\)17_ultrasound_training.pdf](http://www.rcr.ac.uk/docs/radiology/pdf/BFCR(12)17_ultrasound_training.pdf) (accessed 23 March 2013)

KEY POINTS

- Respect your CV, keep it up to date and regard it as an important document to help in your career progression.
- Think carefully about the content in your CV, don't duplicate, be selective and remember 'less is more'.
- Use a professional font, paper and email address.
- Develop and demonstrate your own USP, tailor your future achievements to this if you can.
- Keep in touch with and update your referees.