

Writing your curriculum vitae

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Your curriculum vitae (CV) is your gateway to shortlisting. A good CV takes a long time to prepare. It should not only record your training but, more importantly, should reflect your 'physicianly' qualities, management skills and knowledge of health-care systems.

INTRODUCTION

Your curriculum vitae (CV) is your passport to an interview, promotion and salary change. For a consultant post, the content and presentation make a huge impression, whether for an appointment, for discretionary points or for academic promotion. Under-representing your achievements is considered really bad form, because it could be interpreted as you assuming that everyone knows you or should know you and your achievements. If you cannot be bothered to explain your achievements in simple language for non-specialists then you will not impress.

For many junior posts the competition is fierce. Those responsible for the shortlisting have only your CV to go on. The days of either you or your old boss making a phone call to secure an appointment are long past. Proper presentation of yourself is everything.

GENERAL RULES

Front page

CVs should be fresh every time you apply for a post. The name of the post for which you are applying should be marked clearly on the front sheet, together with your name, degrees and the date. Old, recycled CVs which omit current details will be spotted immediately. You should always use clean good quality paper — faxes are not acceptable. If applying for an senior house officer (SHO) post, it is not necessary to present your CV in a folder (it slows up shortlisting) but using a folder is a good idea for a consultant post. Forms, available on-line for each specialty and region, are required for specialist registrar (SpR) posts with national training numbers. Make sure you follow all the instructions to the letter.

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Font

Choice of font is important (Forsyth and Waller, 1995). The easiest text to read is serif (like this text) which is a text with small tails which allows the eye to take in whole words at a time. Fancy fonts, italics, capital letters and central positioning all make reading difficult. Positioning is best as ragged right. Underlining is a leftover from the age of the typewriter and has been replaced by emboldening.

Personal details

The usual details may be followed by the name of your secondary school — it's up to you. If applying for an SHO post you can mention your A-level results.

At all levels it is important to mention abilities that show you are a good team player. Of all the professions, health care is the one where good working relationships are crucial to good outcomes, no matter how skilful you are. Travel abroad, what you learnt and how it would be useful to you in your chosen specialty, charity work, sporting achievements and all prizes and accolades should be mentioned. You must blow your own trumpet.

Previous training and experience

List your posts briefly. Don't worry about the size of the hospital or the number of beds. What people want to know is whether you have been properly supervised and trained to the standard required for entry to the next level. At SHO level some of the best posts want their trainees fresh, as the employers feel they can train people properly from the start. So don't worry if you have not had any previous experience in the specialty. Find out what is expected before you apply.

Clinical skills: For an SpR post you will have to enumerate the clinical skills your college expects you to have learnt

at this stage in your training. It is wise to obtain a copy of the application form so you know what is expected of you as soon as you know which specialty you want to enter. For all junior doctors there are college curricula and, for most, training portfolios. You can say:

'I have been trained in the following procedures and skills as listed in the college curriculum. I am applying for this post to extend my training in... (all the things you still need to learn).'

It will make a good impression if you say you have a training portfolio, especially one which includes reflective notes. You may be asked to produce this at interview.

Communication skills: The most difficult part of a CV for appointment at any level is to write the section on communication skills, to show you know how to deal with angry patients and relatives and so on. The best way to do this is to give examples. Most complaints result from poor communication. Your future employer will want to know that you are aware of this, have been trained in communication and are non-confrontational.

If you are going for a junior post, you could give examples:

'During my post at so-and-so I was required to spend half an hour each day talking to a patient with a chronic disease (say cancer, chronic lung disease). From this I learnt...'

Or

'I led the psychosocial meetings with the rehabilitation team. From this I learnt...'

Demonstration of an understanding of what goes on in the community, such as visiting patients' homes to see how they get on after surgery, will make a huge impression. All of this is very individual and is one of the most revealing parts of a CV. You will be asked about holistic

care and multidisciplinary working at your interview, so make sure you outline your training in these areas in your CV.

Audit: Clinical governance and audit are important even for the most junior doctor. Make sure you have read the many guidelines on these issues and can explain what the importance of each is: 'I am familiar with... (the following publications)'. Make sure you know about complaints procedures. You may have to write an essay about an audit project you have taken part in. If you have not completed a project, you can tactfully mention that 80% of junior doctors' audit is not completed and mention other governance endeavours you have been involved with, such as case note review and critical incident review (Jaffe and McKenzie, 1999).

Reflective practice: 'Reflection' and 'reflective notes' are now prominent in adult education. You could be asked to write an essay about a patient's management which changed your view about practice, or a case which demonstrated your communication skills. These essays are supposed to reveal how reflective you are. Reflective notes are accepted in continuing medical education (CME). If you keep them, mention this in your CV.

How do you see the future in your chosen specialty? What are the biggest challenges? Remember, the future of health care for most people in the world is quite different from that in the West. Start with the future in developing countries. Don't be afraid to mention the relationship of health with war and politics, the effect of nutrition, infection, limb loss, blindness, and the relationship with education. Show that you have had a rounded education and can see further than the end of a microscope — or a scalpel. Mention the challenges of an ageing population, the cost of chronic illness and the increasing expectations of the public.

There is usually a section for extras. Highlight things that you've done related to health-care delivery rather than personal achievements. These should also appear, but as secondary.

THE CONSULTANT CV

Applying for a first consultant post requires a whole strategy. Is this the

right job? If it isn't you'll soon be found out at interview if not before. Before starting on refining your CV find out what sort of person they want. Most trusts want a decent, personable, competent colleague, not necessarily someone who will set the world on fire. At the same time, you will be expected to be keen on 'developing', 'innovating' and 'complementing'. Your CV should reflect what is asked for in the job description.

Personal details

A lot of applicants agonise over these because they feel that their nationality, religion or marital status could go against them. A married woman, aged 34 years, with no children, may feel that prospective employers will say to themselves: 'As soon as she gets a job she's going to start a family'. It's up to you how much detail you give about yourself. It's helpful to list your defence union number and your General Medical Council number.

Training

There is no need to go through every post ever undertaken and describe what you did. Simply emphasize what you have been trained in and what you can offer the new post. If you are going to work in a district general hospital (DGH) then the details of your MD are less important than details about training in management and governance.

Make sure you have read the NHS Plan and are familiar with the primary care trust set-up in the district you're going to. Stress your training in leadership and the skills in which you are proficient, your training in multidisciplinary working and your understanding of resource management, giving examples relating to your specialty. Stress your understanding of the balance between efficacy and cost, with examples of how you see yourself working.

In your interview, you are bound to be asked about things with which you don't agree. Ensure you know how to answer such questions diplomatically. 'What do you think of the nurse practitioner?' Don't say 'They're all very well but...' — everything before the 'but' is a lie. Don't say 'Well, you have to be very

careful'. Be as enthusiastic as you honestly can about everything that's new. 'Challenging' and 'exciting' are good words to practice. Preempt the questions by mentioning new ideas in your CV. Some trusts will invite shortlisted candidates to make a presentation. Consider, at the time you are writing your CV, what, if asked, you might be expected to talk about. Then make sure you allude to this in your section on why you are applying for the post.

Know what you are entitled to. New consultants should have an office of their own and a secretary with equivalent sessions.

COURSES, PROJECTS AND RESEARCH

Try to promote projects which have displayed your initiative. A CV which lists courses attended is very passive. Say why you attended them. The list should be balanced with projects and changes which you initiated afterwards. You can consult your reflective notes to remind you. Even if you only assisted in a research project you will have learnt something, such as the importance of a clear protocol, ethics approval and so on. If you have an impressive research record and are applying for a DGH post, emphasize how time spent in out-of-programme research has had side benefits, such as prioritising, critical appraisal of perceived wisdom or presentation.

Take care with your publication list. List original papers in peer-reviewed journals separately from invited articles and letters. If you were a middle author, you might like to say what role you played. Embolden your own name.

CAREER AIMS FOR ALL POSTS

This is the most important section at any level. First, your commitment to the specialty should be reflected here if you are a trainee — it is not enough to say: 'I am committed to becoming an orthopaedic surgeon'. Go on to mention why you have chosen the specialty and what excites you about it. If you are applying for a consultant post, your commitment to the area and the post should be convincing. Your prospective colleagues will want to know that you are making an active choice in wanting to join them.

You should demonstrate good reasons for applying. A lot of homework needs to be done, including trying to see senior members of all the subspecialties which will be important to you.

Second, it should be clear that you believe the post is going to give you some satisfaction and you see it as more than a paid job of work. Once again, 'challenge' is a good word.

Third, mention complementary working. It is surprising how many consultants feel threatened by a new young, energetic colleague who will undoubtedly have skills which they do not. Be alert to this. In your efforts to impress, make sure you don't make prospective colleagues feel inferior and out-of-date.

Fourth, mention realistic developments you'd like to undertake. So that they are realistic, you should have discussed anything that is likely to be expensive (and need a cost-benefit analysis) with the appropriate people beforehand. Finally, for all new posts you must be committed to good links with the community.

OTHER TIPS

Be patient with personnel departments, especially if they ask you for large numbers of copies of your CV. They don't have the time for photocopying and if you want the job you'll get on with it. An angry exchange with a recruitment officer, without question,

will be related to those you would least want it to be. You don't want to fail even before you've been sent the form.

For forms which have to be filled in on-line, make sure you don't leave any boxes empty. Use the font they have asked for. You will have to spend a lot of time summarizing your achievements in order to fit the boxes. This can take many hours. It is obvious when applicants have taken the time to write clearly so that the CV can be easily read.

All those applying for a post for the first time should let as many peers and supervisors see the CV and take senior mentors' advice. The CV for any post, but particularly a first consultant post, will have to be revised many times. Start early as soon as you know the post is available. **HM**

Conflict of interest: none.

Forsyth R, Waller A (1995) Making your point: principles of visual design for computer aided slide and poster production. *Arch Dis Child* 72: 80-4

Jaffe AD, McKenzie SA (1999) Training in audit for junior doctors. *RCPCH Newsletter* September

KEY POINTS

- A curriculum vitae should be prepared many weeks before you need it.
- It is not just a record of training but also reflects attitudes to patient care, knowledge of health-care systems, initiative, leadership skills and team playing.
- The section on career aims is one of the most important.