

N.B. Your personal statement is the product of a period of reflection and preparation

Introduction/Why do you want to do medicine?

You start with a very interesting piece about your immediate experience with medical conditions in the family. Sometimes people can overdo this type of opening, but your circumstances are clearly quite striking, so you don't fall into that bracket.

You have extrapolated from your family experience that high quality medical care and good listening are particularly important parts of being a doctor. You might want to illustrate this with a particular example from your family situation.

However, there is still one piece of the jigsaw missing. Many people have relatives with medical conditions and have seen great healthcare in action – but they don't want to become a doctor. So, why has this experience made you want to take up the mantle?

You later say that your experience in hospital inspired you. But what inspired you to do that placement in the first place? You have the ingredients here for a great opening, but you really need to reflect on this and be clear in your own mind how the mixture of personal experience, emotional drivers and work placements have blended to make you want to be a doctor. Then you can distil it into a more clear and incisive opening.

When you get to 'Experience in General Practice...', this should probably be the start of a new paragraph specifically on your work experience. This creates a clear delineation, and will allow your refined 'why I want to be a doctor' opening to stand out.

What have you done to gain an insight?

You have a fantastic array of experience. This is captured in the third paragraph. However, you end up simply listing all the things you have seen. What is missing, therefore, is an element of *reflection*. In other words: what lessons did you take from these experiences? What key attributes did you learn the value of? This idea of reflection is absolutely central to medical schools' assessments. Consider the following from The University of Oxford:

'You won't be judged on what you've done: we want to know what you learned from doing it.'

So, it is vital that you get some more reflection in here. Really think about what happened in each of the cases you have described. Who was in the team? How did they communicate or work as a together to maximise each other's strengths? How did the surgeon cope under extreme pressure? And what has this shown you about yourself and your desire to pursue a medical career?

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If necessary, you could use fewer examples with more detailed reflection. But a good way around this might be to condense the first two paragraphs into one shorter one, then have a longer paragraph on work experience – complete with reflection and learning points! Your volunteering with the community support group and care home are great. But, again, where was this? And what was the time frame? If you have been volunteering for a long time, that will show commitment and dedication. You use a good example of a relationship you built after a challenging start. This might be a good chance to speak specifically about ‘empathy’ – an important term.

Are you suited to the medical school/life as a doctor?

The paragraph which starts with your academic work and goes on to cover your extracurricular activities has lots of great material in it. But, ideally, this needs to be used to more explicitly highlight the key qualities that you possess and that are needed by a medical student / doctor.

For instance, you talk about being president of the Journalism Society. What characteristics did this require? Perhaps determination and leadership? If so, those also happen to be invaluable traits in a medical professional. Did organizing trips require teamwork? These are the sorts of links you need to make in order to maximise the value of all the excellent things that you’ve done.

These are some of the key traits you want to establish that you possess in your statement:

- ✓ Empathy
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Teamwork & Leadership
- ✓ Stress management
- ✓ Desire to learn and to teach

We favour a technique that we have called the ‘Signpost and Substantiate Strategy’. This entails namechecking the above traits to ‘signpost’ to the reader that you know they are key qualities, and then substantiating them with a personal example from school/ extracurricular /work experience.

It also means you won’t miss anything. For instance, you might need something more on empathy, and also to demonstrate that you understand that being a doctor can be extremely stressful.

You have the ingredients; it’s just about making those links.

Closing paragraph

This is slightly glib. It doesn’t add anything new. All it does is effectively say: ‘I’ve finished’. It can be a nice touch to introduce one strong experience or talking point at the end that has not been mentioned before. This makes the conclusion more than a generic summary.

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Language Used

Generally speaking, this is good: clear and incisive. You don't overcomplicate and you use short, punchy sentences, which is the style we advocate. However, it is important that you get in some of the key words that we mentioned before:

- ✓ Empathy
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Teamwork & Leadership
- ✓ Stress management
- ✓ Desire to learn and to teach

If just reeled off as a list of buzzwords, then these carry little weight. But if you remember to use the 'signpost and substantiate strategy' then you will be able to bring them to life. You certainly have enough excellent experience to do this.

Try to make sure language is always active and positive. For example, instead of 'there was the additional challenge from switching to higher level chemistry', you should say: 'I embraced the challenge of switching to higher level chemistry.'

Structure/Layout

At the moment, the structure and paragraphing is a bit confused. It is, therefore, not showcasing your achievements in the best possible way. You should strongly think about changing to the following structure:

- Why I want to be a doctor
- Hospital experience
- International experience
- Volunteering experience
- CREST and stem cells
- EPQ and wider reading
- Extracurricular
- Closing

Ideally, each of these should be written as one clear and decisive paragraph.

Overall Thoughts

This has the makings of an exceptional statement. But it needs some work. The ingredients are all there, it is just a matter of putting them together to maximise their value.

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Your Key Action Points

- Make opening relevant to you and your motivation
- Move key parts of last paragraph into the opening
- Change structure as suggested
- Reflect more on work experiences
- Extract broad lessons as well as niche interests
- Be prepared to speak in detail on topics raised
- Read around HIV before interview
- Use the word 'empathy'
- Make language/punctuation corrections
- Reconsider closing

Good luck!