

**CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY
LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEE**

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GUIDANCE ON WORK EXPERIENCE AND WORK OBSERVATION

Introduction

Practices are often contacted by schools or school children asking about the possibility of work experience. These are usually prospective medical students, and may be as young as 15. Practices should always feel able to decline such requests, but they often feel under pressure to say yes. The LMC has therefore formulated this guidance on the issues involved for practices which do wish to provide work experience. The LMC is grateful to the BMA and to Leeds LMC, whose own guidance has been extensively used in producing this document.

Work observation v work experience

Work observation is when a student spends time observing a doctor's work. It is often called "shadowing" or "work experience". The term work observation helps observers to have realistic expectations of how their time will be spent, and to understand that they can only observe and will not be able to participate in any clinical work.

Work observation with a GP is only one way for students to get information about a medical career. Various guides, a BMA video called "A stressful shift", and a reading list can all be obtained from <http://web.bma.org.uk/homepage.nsf/htmlpagevw/careers>. Volunteering for work in a hospice, nursing home, or day centre may also give the prospective student valuable insights. A practice should therefore not feel pressured into saying yes to a request for a student placement. There are plenty of other opportunities available.

Confidentiality

Doctors must emphasise the importance of patient confidentiality to observer, including ensuring that the observers are sent information about confidentiality before they begin their placement. Doctors must also talk to the observers about the importance of confidentiality at the start of the attachment, and must be satisfied that the student is mature and responsible enough to understand the principles of confidentiality. Doctors are ultimately responsible for any breaches of confidentiality that may occur. A draft confidentiality agreement is attached to these guidelines, but even if the student signs this the doctor is still responsible for any breaches.

To reduce potential problems it is suggested that work observation takes place outside the observer's immediate locality, to reduce the chances of meeting someone s/he knows. It is also be advisable to ask for a reference from either a schoolteacher or a parent.

Knowing the limits

All staff within the practice need to know and agree the boundaries of the work observation. Observers need also to know the limits of their position.

Observers should only be present during consultations if patients have given their permission. Ideally this should be in writing. Doctors, or someone they delegate to do the task, must explain to the patient prior to the consultation that someone would like to watch the consultation, but that this requires their consent. The patient must be told who the observer is, in case the patient knows the observer, and why s/he wants to observe. The patient needs time to consider this, and s/he should be made to feel that there is no undue pressure to agree. Doctors must make sure that the patient understands that s/he can ask the observer to leave at any point in the consultation without prejudice to the treatment.

A waiting room notice should explain to patients that a student is present in the practice on work observation, but that they will only attend consultations with the express permission of the patient. Doctors must also explain this to each patient prior to their consultation.

Observers must not be involved in any clinical tasks, such as minor operations. Care should also be taken to protect observers from witnessing traumatic events.

MODEL CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I understand that information about patients held by this practice is confidential and that this confidentiality is permanent. I have received education and training on this matter.

I have read and understood the practice policy on confidentiality, and agree to be bound by its terms. I undertake not to disclose personal information learnt in the course of my presence in the practice to anybody outside the practice. If I feel that disclosure is necessary in the public, patient or family interest, I will first discuss this with the appropriate health professional.

I understand that a breach of this obligation will result in my work observation being terminated and that other appropriate action may be taken.

Signed

Date

Name

Address

March 2005