



# Clinical placements – what to expect as a medical student

General  
Medical  
Council

# Clinical placements – what to expect as a medical student

*“Starting a clinical placement as a medical student can be daunting but the experiences you gain are invaluable and often become a highlight of medical school.”*

This guide covers what to expect from your clinical placements, what’s expected of you, and how to raise concerns.

It highlights the relevant parts of our [guidance on undergraduate clinical placements](#) which is aimed at medical schools and placement providers. This content has been developed by medical students, for medical students, and it includes quotes about their experiences. It will help you understand:

- [What are clinical placements](#)
- [What to expect from clinical placements](#)
- [What’s expected of medical students during clinical placements](#)
- [How to address concerns about a clinical placement](#)

Our *Clinical placements* guidance provides advice for medical schools and placement providers on how your placements should be planned and delivered, and how medical students should be supported and integrated into the multidisciplinary team. By understanding what to expect, you can get the most out of your time on placement.

## What are clinical placements?

Clinical placements are planned blocks of time within your medical degree where you go to a health or social care setting for educational purposes. They’re an important opportunity to get practical experience in a variety of specialties and settings, and the chance to interact with a diverse range of patients. They’re designed to help equip you with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours you’ll need as a newly qualified doctor, as set out in [Outcomes for graduates](#).

## Where will my clinical placements be?

Clinical placements can take place in primary, secondary, community, or other health and social care settings, with some aspects involving remote consultations. They’re not confined to the working environments that doctors work in but should include wider multidisciplinary teams.

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You can expect to gain experience across a variety of settings. This may include urban and rural locations, tertiary and district general hospitals, and community and third sector settings.

Your medical school should offer support for costs incurred for attending remote placements. For example, travel costs if a placement is an unreasonable distance from your term time accommodation.

### **Our best experiences were when:**

- *“We were fully integrated and felt part of the team”*
- *“There was a clear and comprehensive timetable of clinical and teaching activities”*
- *“We were observed whilst carrying out clinical skills and given feedback”*
- *“We were able to give feedback on how the placement was going”*
- *“We knew who to go to for help”*

## **What to expect before you start your clinical placement**

Before starting a clinical placement, you should:

- get a timetable with teaching opportunities
- know what the learning outcomes of the placement are
- receive a local induction
- be given information on how to raise safety or quality concerns, and information on how to access support networks, such as wellbeing services
- be introduced to the clinical team
- be shown around and given access to IT systems and ward access cards
- get access to changing facilities and rest areas.

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# During your clinical placements

## Learning and development

During your clinical placement, for your learning and development, you should:

- be able to learn and develop a number of skills on placement, including carrying out physical examinations, taking patient histories, and communicating with patients
- have scheduled teaching sessions focused on your learning and development
- have adequate supervision during your clinical placement to make sure patients are safe
- have a named clinical supervisor who oversees your clinical work throughout your placement and provides ongoing feedback
- have a named educational supervisor who should meet with you regularly to help plan your training and review your progress against the learning outcomes for the clinical placement.



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## Experience and integration

To gain experience during your clinical placement, you should:

- be treated fairly and with respect, regardless of your background or protected characteristics
- not experience any bullying or harassment, but if this does occur, it should be taken seriously
- be integrated within the clinical team and they should recognise that you play an important role in supporting patient care
- be involved in all clinical activities and observations. This can range from participation, assisting or leading, depending on your previous experience and competency.

It's important that medical schools and placement providers work together to create an inclusive learning environment. All students should have equal opportunities to be involved in clinical activities. [Reasonable adjustments](#) should be made available if required.

## Feel safe and well supported

- Clinical placements can be challenging, and exciting, with lots of new experiences, but you should feel safe and well supported at all times.
- Your safety is paramount within the placement. You should be given the same protection as qualified doctors in terms of rest time after out of hours shifts, and access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Medical schools and placement providers should support your wellbeing. This may involve offering psychological support following challenging scenarios, providing facilities and time for you to observe your faith, or offering reasonable adjustments for students with childcare or caring responsibilities.

## Feedback and evaluation

*"Feedback enabled me to grow and develop as a medical student. It allowed me to appreciate my strengths, but to also work on my weaker areas."*

You should receive formal and informal feedback on your performance during your clinical placements. This can come from a variety of sources including your patients, clinical supervisor, educational supervisor, clinical team, non-clinical staff, and fellow students.

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Feedback and evaluation should be an active and continuous process. Your medical school will ask you to provide feedback about your experience so they can adapt and deliver the best possible clinical placements for future students.

Students and all members of the clinical team should proactively seek and give feedback.

## Different types of clinical placements

The experience you gain through clinical placements is hugely varied. Here we share some examples of the types of experiences you should expect to have during a clinical placement.

### During hospital placements, you should expect to:

- interact with a diverse group of patients on the wards, taking histories and performing examinations
- follow patients from admission through to discharge to gain a greater understanding of the patient journey
- lead in aspects of a ward round to develop your leadership skills, while appropriately supervised
- carry out clinical procedures within the limits of your competence and under appropriate supervision
- formulate management plans for patients
- practice documenting in the patient records, while appropriately supervised
- attend specialist clinics to gain a deeper understanding of medical conditions
- learn from scheduled and opportunistic bedside teaching
- shadow members of the multidisciplinary team including nurses, pharmacists, healthcare assistants, physiotherapists, and physician associates
- gain experience in out-of-hours clinical activities.

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## During general practice placements, you should expect to:

- gain experience with multiple modes of communication such as face to face, telephone, and video consultations
- follow patients with chronic illness or multimorbidity throughout their journey
- run your own clinics under appropriate supervision and in accordance with your competence
- be involved with writing referrals to secondary care
- participate in clinical audits, peer teaching, and quality improvement projects
- attend practice meetings.

## During third sector or community setting placements, you should expect to:

- gain experience in community outreach work such as visits to community based health facilities, hospices, homeless shelters, and care homes
- gain an understanding of the social determinants of health and the importance of equality, diversity, and inclusion in healthcare systems.

*“Community based placements allowed me to see how much social factors affect health and why, as future clinicians, we cannot ignore this element when treating our patients.”*

For a more comprehensive list of the types of experience you may have, please see our [Guidance on undergraduate clinical placements - Medical students should feel part of the team](#)

## Assistantships

Before you start work as a foundation doctor, your medical school should organise for you to carry out a ‘student assistantship’. Your medical school may call this period something different, such as ‘Preparing for practice’, but the aim of this is to prepare you for the reality of working as an F1 in a clinical environment. You can find more information on what to expect in our [guidance on clinical placements - Student assistantships - GMC \(gmc-uk.org\)](#).

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# What's expected of medical students during their clinical placement?

*"Your first placement can seem daunting, especially when performing clinical skills for the first time. Patients are often very understanding that you are learning and are happy to help with your medical education - just always be honest and ask for help when you need to."*

## Patient safety and patients' rights

- Patient safety is core to [Good medical practice](#) and it should be your priority while you're on a placement.
- It is important you understand how to raise patient safety concerns. [Raising and acting on concerns about patient safety](#) provides guidance on the steps to take. You should also follow local guidelines provided by your medical school or placement provider.
- Always be honest with patients about your level of experience and capabilities, and ask for support and guidance when necessary.
- Remember that patient confidentiality is crucial to patient care, so you have a responsibility to protect it.

## Professionalism

- Attendance and punctuality are important. You should let the clinical team know if you are unable to attend or are running late.
- It's important to dress presentably and follow infection prevention and control guidelines.
- Take care when using social media. In order to maintain professional boundaries, you can alter your privacy settings on social media. You must make sure that you do not share any potentially identifiable information about patients online to protect their confidentiality. You can check our [guidance on social media use](#) and our [ethical hub topic about social media](#) for more advice.
- For more information on what behaviours are expected of you as a medical student during clinical placement, read [Achieving good medical practice](#).



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## Become part of the team

- Get involved with the multidisciplinary team. You will gain valuable experience in understanding the key role of each discipline and how this contributes to providing the patient with the best possible care.
- Be a team player! Greet the team at the start of each day and introduce yourself.
- Engage with courtesy and respect to colleagues, patients, and visitors.

## Learning and experience

- You're responsible for your own learning, both theory, and practical skills. If you've not completed a practical skill previously, it is best to observe first and ask for assistance. Our [Practical skills and procedures guidance](#) outlines what you should be able to do by the time you graduate.
- Seize every opportunity to learn and take part in clinical activities as this will best prepare you for your future role as a foundation doctor.
- Experiential learning in clinical placements is fundamental, but if you find that there are fewer clinical activities available, it's important to pursue learning through self-study, lectures, and webinars.

## How to raise concerns about a clinical placement

**If you have any patient safety concerns while on placement you must raise them promptly. Follow your medical school's policy on raising concerns wherever possible. You can find more information in our [Raising and acting on concerns guidance](#) and [ethical hub topic about speaking up](#).**

Clinical placements are an invaluable part of your learning, experience, and development as a medical student. Medical schools and placement providers must deliver high-quality educational and clinical experiences. It is important that you feel safe, supported, and appropriately supervised during clinical placements throughout medical school.

If at any point you don't feel you're getting the experience you should, it's important to raise this with the appropriate person or organisation so it can be addressed. Speaking up about concerns

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and giving regular feedback are both critical to improving the clinical placement experience for yourself and other medical students in the future.

## How do I raise concerns about the quality of my placement?

You should feel able to raise any concerns and provide honest feedback about the quality of your clinical placements with the clinical team, placement coordinators, and your medical school. You should be able to do this openly, anonymously, and confidentially. When raising the concern in person, you may want to find somewhere quiet to have the conversation. It can be difficult to know who is best to speak to. Your medical school should have a policy, so follow that where you can.

Here are some examples of who to speak to about different concerns.

### Speak to your clinical team (doctor in training / ward staff / consultant) about:

- patient safety concerns
- concerns about the clinical environment
- opportunities to see certain medical conditions or procedures, to facilitate your learning.

### Speak to your educational or clinical supervisor:

- any personal struggles whilst on placement
- not achieving the learning outcomes of your clinical placement
- an incident during your clinical placement
- inappropriate behaviour
- experiencing or witnessing bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

### Speak to your placement co-ordinator about:

- issues with timetables or scheduling of clinical activities
- clinical teams not being aware that you'll be joining them
- IT problems

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- accommodation or travel concerns.

## Speak to your medical school about:

- issues with your educational or clinical supervisor
- assessments concerns
- concerns that are not resolved by your placement provider, you can raise this with your medical school to investigate further.

## Other options

- In England, you can escalate your concerns to the [Freedom to Speak Up Guardian](#) if you cannot resolve them or feel unable to raise them directly.
- If you have a serious or persistent concern about the quality of your education that you've not been able to resolve locally, you can also [report it to us](#).
- You can find more information in our [ethical hub topic about speaking up](#).

**Email:** [gmc@gmc-uk.org](mailto:gmc@gmc-uk.org)

**Website:** [gmc-uk.org](http://gmc-uk.org)

**Telephone:** 0161 923 6602

Textphone: **please dial the prefix 18001** then  
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