

MMI Interviews debrief for Dentists

There are no “right” answers to most interview questions but interviewers are looking for evidence that you are thinking like dentists and can cope with the pressure they are put under in the interview. The key to handling one is to keep calm, answer thoughtfully and try to establish a rapport with the interviewer or, in this case, interviewers – so, in each case, give a handshake at the beginning and end of each mini interview, make eye contact and try to engage with the interviewer as if you are having a conversation. Although they may not give much feedback at the time, they will appreciate the relationship you are immediately trying to establish, just as a good dentist does with a patient.

Station 1 : Why Dentistry? Start with the Science: liking the challenge of analysis and diagnosis, dentistry provides an on-going challenge as it’s developing all the time, all cases present differently etc. There’s a lot of variety (in the chance to do general dental practice work, hospital work, do research, work abroad etc.) and obviously, there’s the chance to impact on the lives of others in a particularly positive and satisfying way. **What qualities do you think a good dentist needs to have?** There is no definitive list but among the main ones they will be looking for are to be able to get top academic results, to be a keen scientist and problem solver, keen to take on life- long learning etc., patient, empathetic, a good communicator, able to inspire other peoples’ trust and confidence (even more important in dentists than medics as so many more people are scared of dentists), having a capacity for hard work, able to shoulder responsibility, able to work under stressful conditions and being a good team worker. There should be some indicator of good manual dexterity and practical skills. As running a lot of dental practices these days also involves business skills, there needs to be business awareness as well. Not a lot to ask really!

If asked about qualities, you just know what the next question will be, hence **Station 2 : what evidence shows that you have the qualities a good dentist needs?** It is surprising how tongue-tied most candidates can be when detailing their experience and what they got from it, learnt from it etc.. What goes down particularly well is when someone talks about how something done or seen was followed up by particular reading, research, action etc. (“I saw cases of ... so I followed up by researching the symptoms, methods of treatment etc.”). Relevant experience does not have to have been at a dental practice but you should seek to get as much of this as possible, if you can. If that is difficult to get via your local NHS Trust, contact your local Rotary Club. That is likely to have a dentist or two among its membership and they are usually very keen to help and will have contacts. Let your own dental practice know that you are interested. You’ll probably be able to do some work and observation there. If possible, also try to get access to an orthodontic dept. at a hospital as that will give you an insight into the whole area of maxillo-facial surgery. At interview you’ll probably be asked what you have learnt from such experiences. Remember that it’s not just what you’ve learnt about dentistry but also about yourself and confirming to you that dentistry is what you want to do and that you have the skills for it.

Station 3: What issues and research are you aware of and find interesting? Check www.ted.com and look at www.futurelearn.com, which will have ideas and introductory courses. Keep a note of press articles especially about research on such as sugar, alcohol etc. and anything that can affect oral health. You don't have to know a lot but certainly about one or two things and again, show that you've followed them up with a bit of independent research.

Station 4: What is provision like in your home area? What is the balance between NHS and private dental care? Is it easy to get access to NHS dental care? Check if there is any report on dental health in the last report about your local NHS Trust. **What do you think are the biggest health care issues for dentists these days?** Note that it does say "health care" issues so don't get involved in issues about funding. This is about what latest research is saying about foodstuffs that cause us dental and oral damage, poverty which puts people off going to seek dental care, immobility of older people who therefore cannot attend dental surgeries (dental healthcare isn't done via home visits as medical care can be.).

Station 5: Is the need for dentists mainly the result of poor lifestyle choices? Don't forget that a lot of dental problems are inherited. Others are the results of accidents. **How can we persuade people to take better dental care?** Starting early is an obvious answer, i.e. targeting young people from as young an age as possible but we do need to keep topping that up with all other age groups and use campaigns that actually and physically demonstrate to people what oral health means in practice (i.e. more than just cleaning your teeth absent-mindedly once a day just before bedtime)? Lots of old people say that they wish they'd taken better care of their teeth – using their statements in adverts might work!

Station 6: Sketch and label the structure of the typical adult molar tooth. It is amazing the number of applicants who can't do this. You are not expected to have a great deal of dental knowledge but this is basic biology and you are more likely to be asked specifically relevant questions like this than medics or vets are in their interviews. Other questions are the one about wisdom teeth, what do you know about titanium, how would you distinguish between calcium oxide and calcium carbonate? etc.

Station 7: Discuss the view that cosmetic dentistry is just making money out of vanity. This is not just self-indulgence as sometimes people portray it. It can have a major impact on a person's self-image and self-confidence and therefore plays a very important part in feelings of overall wellbeing.

Station 8: The child patient. It is not unusual these days for dental schools to have actors who will role play being awkward patients, having panic attacks etc., and you are being tested on your ability to cope with a situation, on being able to keep calm and, above all, trying to keep the patient calm via, in this case, being very caring, talking quietly to them and winning them round to let you do the necessary checks or dental work.

Station 9: This sort of sum is too small for you to have grandiose ideas so they are looking for you to come up with some initiative that will be preventative and hopefully save a lot of money in the long run by preventing the need for costly dental intervention later on. **What shows you have good business skills?** Most dental practices these days are run as businesses so showing that you've got some insights into business practice by having been involved in a Young Enterprise Scheme, some appropriate work experience etc. would be useful.

Station 10: How do you cope with stress? Please do not say that you don't get stressed. You are a human being, not an android, and saying you don't get stressed suggests little self-awareness, which in turn could cause others to doubt your empathy skills. Dentistry is a stressful career so they want to know what coping strategies you have, outlets, a life other than dentistry that can help you relax, restore your perspective and give you enjoyment. Don't necessarily be too honest and reveal personal information but do **Describe a situation where your intervention has made a decisive difference.** This does not have to have been a life-threatening scenario – simply one where you can show that you took a lead, were persuasive, got others' agreement and had a good outcome. All of those things reflect well on your levels of confidence and communication skills. **What would you do if not offered a place to read Dentistry this year?** There is really only one answer they wish to hear and that is "see you next year – I shall re-apply", i.e. I am very determined to be a dentist and, as long as it is realistic, I shall keep applying.

There is not a lot of relevant reading available but I would recommend "A very short introduction to Teeth" from the "very short introduction to..." series and "The Complete Pre-dental Guide to Modern Dentistry" by Syrbu. "From the Trenches" by Coughlin is an introduction to the business skills required for running a practice.

Don't feel that you've got to do loads of things. One or two will be fine. Admissions Officers will be more interested in what you feel you've learnt from doing them and similarly from any work experience or shadowing you've had. It's not just the list of what you've done (the quantity), it's the quality of the experience and what you learnt from it.

Keep a portfolio of what you do so that you don't forget anything and use it when you come to write your personal statement and prepare for any interview. When you do write your personal statement, keep it simple and clear and remember that applications need to be in by **OCTOBER 15th** so don't leave things to the last minute.

If the UKCAT test needs to be taken, sign up for that and look at the website for practice questions. There is also the book "600 UKCAT" Practice Questions, which is well worth investing in. There's a lot to think about and do but it's well worth it - so very best of luck.

Peter Rawling