

## Introductory Leaflet on Preparing for Patients Module A

Preparing for Patients Module A is your first professional experience of meeting and listening to patients. The PfP course has been developed to help you to begin interviewing patients about their medical problems, and to discover the clinical context of the material which you will be learning about in lectures and practicals.

Module A of the course, which runs in the first two terms of year 1, involves one visit each term to a GP practice when you will interview patients in pairs. On one visit you will do short interviews in surgery and on another you will visit a patient at home for an hour. Naturally you are not expected to make any diagnosis or provide treatment at this stage, but you will find it interesting and useful to hear about the patients' experiences of being unwell. At a Preparation Session we will set out guidelines and teach you a method of making sense of what you hear.

Medicine is both about people and the application of science to their health problems. As a doctor, you will need to skillfully and sensitively work with individual patients and use your scientific knowledge to attempt to alleviate their mental and physical problems. **Disease** is the biomedical cause of being unwell in terms of pathophysiology (what is happening at the levels of cells and organs): fractured femur, pneumonia, breast cancer, diabetes, thalassaemia, etc. **Illness** is the individual patient's unique experience of sickness, and includes their feelings and worries and the effects on life (immobility, time off work, fear of dying, dietary changes, marriage restrictions in the above cases). One of the fascinating things about medicine is the way the same disease can be expressed as different illnesses in different patients, and the challenge of diagnosis is that the similar illnesses can be due to quite different diseases. You can even have one without the other, as in the table below.

		DISEASE	
		Yes	No
ILLNESS	Yes	Influenza	Tension headache
	No	Hypertension	

A doctor's job is to find out what is wrong with someone and then to offer treatment if possible, but always to give care. **Communication skills** are important and particularly so in obtaining the required information. The patient must feel comfortable and have confidence in the doctor for this to work properly, so you must become a good listener. At first, the symptoms and problems that the patients describe will bear little relation to the basic medical science that you are learning for the Tripos, so one of the objectives of PfP is to help you make these links. As you learn more of medical science, so you will build up in your mind a picture of the functioning (and then the malfunctioning) human body. A good scientific mind is required for the diagnostic process. But it is not sufficient merely for the doctor to comprehend exactly what is wrong with the patient; this information must be communicated sensitively to the patient in a way that they can understand. So the doctor must be a good teacher, explaining to patients why they have become ill and what can be done about it.

Since patients trust doctors with the private details of their daily lives, the doctor must be worthy of that trust. PfP helps introduce students to the concept of **confidentiality** which sets very strict limits on the sharing of information given by a patient. There must be no mention of patients' names outside the surgery, and no discussion of their cases outside the teaching environment.

PfP also introduces students to the concept of **consent**. A patient, unlike an enzyme or a nerve membrane, is a person like you with thoughts and feelings and their permission is required before you plunge into an interview with them about their life and bodily functions. Nor can patients be treated without their informed consent, which involves explaining enough to enable

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them to reach a decision.

Working in pairs enables students in turn to observe the **interview process** and make notes on how successful it was. You will learn from giving and receiving feedback to one another, and your GP Tutor will help you with this too. There may also be moments of difficulty in interviews (emotions, silences, languages) and we want to alert you to these so that you can treat them as a challenge and learn from them with the help of your GP Tutor. Because the interviews are set in real life situations, anything may crop up and this is one of the excitements and challenges of general practice.

You are required to submit one piece of written work during the course. This will be submitted online, and will be read **and commented on by a GP Assessor**. Coursework will not be given a numerical mark however submission of this work is a compulsory element of the 2nd MB assessment and you are required to pass. At the final session, the group will observe two GPs interviewing a patient. You will have the opportunity to ask questions and share your experiences.

This course is closely linked with the 'Social and Ethical Context of Health and Illness' course. Together, these courses form the 'Preparing for Clinical Practice' strand of the first year.

### *Some previous Questions and Answers:*

Q: I am rowing that afternoon, can I swap GP visits?

A: It's very difficult because of complexity of the timetable - swaps are strongly discouraged as they make an enormous amount of work for the PfP admin team. If you must swap, it is up to you first to find another student willing to swap, preferably someone due to visit the same Practice, and do the same activity there as yourself. After you have found them, contact the PfP admin team who will need your full name, College, and set number, and as courtesy, you should inform the Practice.

Q: I have come down with flu so can't do my GP visit and it's too late to arrange a swap, what can I do?

A: Telephone the PfP admin team on 01223 769288/ or email [pfp@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:pfp@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Q: I have to go home for a family occasion and will not be able to attend my GP visit / session.

A: Most events of this sort are known about well in advance. Please let us know and your Director of Studies, as soon as you receive your confirmation of admission. Your Director of Studies will be able to advise you whether the reason is likely to be considered valid. Otherwise, family funerals or serious illness in family members are the only emergencies considered acceptable reasons for non-attendance at a GP session. If such an emergency arises, you should let your Tutor, Director of Studies and the PfP admin team (Tel 01223 769288, email [pfp@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:pfp@medschl.cam.ac.uk)) know as soon as possible.

Q: We turned up at the Practice but they had forgotten we were coming.

A: Mistakes do happen, or a doctor may be unwell; we suggest one person from each group telephones the Practice the day before to confirm. A substitute visit will be arranged if the Practice cannot have you.

Q: I am scheduled to visit the Practice where I am registered as a patient, but I would prefer not to go there.

A: Contact the PfP admin team as soon as possible: [pfp@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:pfp@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

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Q: My partner is ill, so I am due to be on my own with a patient at the Practice.

A: You can still do the patient interviews, although you will miss the feedback.

Q: I forgot to go to my GP attachment, what can I do?

A: Please be more careful, doctors are expected to be organised people. In addition, if there is an absent-minded student in your group of four, one of you could take care to remind them.

Q: Where can I find out more about PfP?

A: Course information, such as the course handbooks and placement details, will be uploaded to the PfP Moodle site. You will do four different modules of PfP during your three years as an undergraduate. Details of the course are on Moodle and the Faculty of Biology website <https://www.biology.cam.ac.uk/>

Q: How do I get to the GP Practice?

A: For practices in town please arrive by bicycle wherever possible so that you have transport for home visits, for practices out of town you will have to take a bus and allow enough time. Please see the PfPA Moodle page for GP Practice details and transport guidelines.