

Medical Careers In Rural Communities: Resources To Promote, Encourage, And Support Medicine Applications From The Scottish Highlands

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Background

Applications to study medicine have dropped by 17.2% in comparison with two years ago, according to statistics for the 2024 UCAS cycle¹. Medical schools across the country must act quickly against this downward trending pattern, and the power of outreach activities in combatting this is not to be undervalued².

A significant challenge identified at the University of Aberdeen pertains to the insufficient number of applicants from remote and rural areas, which research indicates as the primary factor influencing doctors' decisions to practise in these regions³. In response to this disparity in the distribution of medical professionals, efforts have been made to allocate resources aimed at providing students from rural backgrounds with exposure to healthcare careers and clear pathways towards becoming a doctor.

Materials and Methods

The University of Aberdeen Medical School has well established connections with hospitals and GP practices across rural Scotland. Senior medical students (years 4 & 5) attending placement in these locations are uniquely placed to deliver and support outreach activities within local schools and communities. The opportunity to utilise this untapped potential is the basis and inspiration behind the development of a set of pre-prepared teaching resources for delivery of coordinated, supported activities for both primary and secondary school pupils.

Materials developed are split broadly into three categories, with the goal of providing continuity and exposure to healthcare, sparking interest and invoking curiosity, throughout a pupil's school career.



Primary School Students

- Practical & engaging
- Early teamworking & communication skills
- Introducing careers in healthcare and basic life support



Secondary School Students

- Collaborative & Informative
- Consolidates MDT approaches
- Introduces diagnostic medicine



Guidance Staff

- Detailed and Insightful
- Standardised information on medicine pathways & application timelines

Conclusions and Future Work

A pilot programme is ongoing at Wick High School, with early feedback proving positive.

Discussions involving clinicians in Caithness, Orkney, and Shetland continue with the goal of imbedding the project within the Aberdeen MBChB curriculum.

Outcomes will highlight any logistical and financial challenges faced and shape the evolution of the materials moving forward.

Resource Links

The resources provided ensure equitable access to information about the application process for students and teachers alike. While adaptable for holistic delivery, the core information remains consistent and accessible. Scan below to view these resources.



Bibliography

1. UCAS. 2024 Cycle Applicant Figures – 16 October Deadline. <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2024-cycle/2024-cycle-applicant-figures-16-october-deadline>. Published 2024. Accessed April 08, 2024.
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3. Grobler L, Marais BJ, Mabunda S. Interventions for increasing the proportion of health professionals practising in rural and other underserved areas. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2015;2015(6):CD005314. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD005314.pub3. Accessed April 08, 2024.