



Book Review

Medical Interviews – A comprehensive guide to CT, ST & Registrar Interview Skills

Olivier Piccard

Edited by Dan Wood & Sebastian Yuen

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Introduction

This book targets a very wide audience, claiming to help candidates prepare for interviews for any of the specialties at both core and higher specialty training entry. But can it really be all things to (almost) all people?

The book's author is a communication coach who now works as Managing Director for ISC Medical (Interview Skills Consulting), a company that runs many courses on medical interview preparation. It is edited by two doctors, a Consultant Urological Surgeon (Dan Wood) and a Consultant Paediatrician (Sebastian Yuen).

Outline of content

The book begins with a preface, followed by a brief but helpful guide on how to use the book (depending on how much time you have to prepare for your interview) and a "health warning". This essentially advises the reader not to repeat the example answers in their own interview verbatim, but instead to use the principles outlined.

Next, the book goes on to describe general interview structure and content. The rest of the book is then devoted to chapters on example interview questions split into separate topics with some "good" and "bad" example answers. The interview question topics comprise background and motivational questions, skills-based questions, academic and clinical governance, difficult colleagues, confidentiality, consent and other ethical principles, difficult scenarios, and NHS issues and hot topics. There is a brief chapter on body language and dress code, and then a section on alternative interview stations

such as presentation stations and group discussion style interviews. Finally, there is a section on useful resources including a list of “action and power words”, key documents and reference websites.

Highlights

The book covers a huge range of potential interview styles and questions. The “good” and “bad” example answers are explained in detail and give the reader key insights into the motives behind the questions and into what the interviewers are looking for. This is undoubtedly of most benefit to those who are unused to medical interviews, for example applicants directly from Foundation Training who may not have had any interview experience since applying to medical school, or those who have been working outside the UK. By far the largest portion of the book is example questions and answers. The core and specialty training programmes for the hospital specialties are very well catered for and there cannot be many questions if any at all that could come up at interview that are not addressed in the book.

Reservations

However, there is not much on offer for those applying for some of the smaller specialties, or to General Practice applicants. The section on group discussions is extremely brief, although GP applicants would be wise to read the NHS issues and hot topics section, as well as the ethics chapters. Additionally, although the book markets itself on being relevant to those applying for registrar posts or higher specialty training, it is perhaps not as useful for such interviews as they are more specialty specific, and by necessity most of the book is extremely general for the broad readership.

It is at points hard to get away from the fact that the author’s background is in communication and recruitment. Some of the “good” example answers are embarrassingly contrived, such as: “there is nothing that gives me more satisfaction than to see the smile on a mother’s face when she sees that we have made a big difference to her child”. It is difficult to imagine someone coming out with something similar in a medical interview and not sounding incredibly artificial. However, the health warning does prompt the reader to look to the principles of the answer, and not the actual wording.

Another slightly unsettling part of the book is the “action and power words” section. This is a list of elaborate words rarely used in general conversation and that may not come across as genuine in an interview. I’m sure that even Sir Alan Sugar would balk at some of the words such as “spearheaded” or “troubleshooter”, and even after much thought it’s difficult to see in what context anyone would use “merchandised”, “litigated” or “debugged” in a medical interview. Generally speaking, I don’t think that the book

effectively warns readers about the potential difficulties with using overly prepared answers in an interview, or in adopting an artificial persona.

Additionally, it is a shame that the publishers could not stretch to colour printing, or perhaps have spaced the text a little better. The layout of the book sometimes feels quite squashed, and in some sections there is very little to break up the text. This is a shame, as there is so much valuable reading matter contained in the book.

Summary

Nevertheless, this is a good general text for interview preparation. Many applicants have no idea where to start with interview preparation, and sometimes are unaware of the extent to which they need to prepare. The book also makes readers aware of the wide variation in interview techniques and question styles – hopefully making it less unsettling when these are encountered in an interview. The sheer breadth of topics covered, and the excellent explanations of potential marking schemes for the questions, adds to the book's value.

This would make a very good preparatory book for anyone approaching a medical interview, but most particularly for those who have little previous interview experience.

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