



Blog of the Month

Dr Mary Johnston is a ST3 Palliative Care registrar in the North East London Deanery. Having gone through the interview process for Palliative Care Training last year, she shares with us her experience and some hints and tips for making the most of your speciality interview.

As the New Year approaches many people will be starting to think about new beginnings and those of us in medicine are no different. Whilst we may be eternally stuck on academic yearly calendars due to august changeovers for jobs, the early months of the year bring those all-important interviews to the next stage. We get a whole 10 minutes to sell ourselves to a panel, to try to persuade them to “pick me, I’m the best!” which to many may be an alien concept. Palliative care interviews were a daunting challenge to me this time last year, the last thing I needed to do to get the job I had set my heart on but could I get past the nerves and secure myself one of those few coveted spots? Spoiler alert – I did and I now am embarking on my new life as a shiny new palliative care registrar but knowing there are many people who are about to face that final hurdle I hope I can give a few tips and pointers to help your journey.

1. Practice the common questions - they will always ask you some variation on why you choose palliative care or why you are good for it. My friends and parents were probably sick of hearing my minute long speech about what made me perfect for the job but having something I could say outlined in my head already for the start of the interview made me so much more relaxed when I got there.
2. Steer them towards what you want to talk about – in the face-to-face interviews, the panel only had a short time with my portfolio and the online version will probably be no different so they likely have not seen your great poster or project you are proud of. However, in



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answering general questions you can mention them and explain why it is relevant to maximise those commitment to specialty points.

3. Know your ethical principles – most medical interviews touch on ethics but in Palliative care, it is a big part of what we do day to day and that is reflected in the interview. By being able to show how you tackle these issues in a methodical way to remain as unbiased as possible indicates you can manage them in real life. I also found this gave me a structure to use in the interview so I didn't waffle on for a while wasting time whilst my brain came up with a good answer
4. Bring in your experience – Even if you have not worked in a hospice, you will have experience of palliative care in your day-to-day work in all specialities. Use cases to show you have this experience and to back up any points you are making. It is much more impactful to say, “a patients relative commented on how understandable my explanation of treatment withdrawal was” than to just say, “I can explain things simply and clearly”.
5. Ask your colleagues for feedback – It is tricky to try to think how to sell yourself and your good points sometimes so sometimes the people you work with can do it so much better. If there are people who have agreed with you when you tell them you want to do palliative care ask them why they think it suits you and build your answers from that.
6. Look at good medical practice – Without a communication station the professionalism section will be more important than ever and having a foundation of knowledge to base your answer on is important. You do not have to memorise it and the question will relate to palliative care so focus on the sections that are most applicable in the days prior to the interview.



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7. Breath and relax – this was what I struggled most with and it is some much simpler to say than to do. Remember that most of the questions are all about you and you are the expert in that so you will have all the answers.

This year interviews will be different, selling yourself through the barrier of a screen is an extra challenge you have that I did not, but there will still be enough similarities to make this useful. Moreover, perhaps it will be a good thing for some... Certainly, you will not arrive to your interview as I did; covered in mud from pushing your car down a duel carriageway where it had broken down and panting from the 10-minute sprint I had done for the last part of the journey! Good luck everybody!

[Event of the month- End of Life Care Webinar, St Care Hospice 8th February 2020 \(Free\).](#)

This month we are highlighting a one-day webinar run by St Clare Hospice. This course aims to support healthcare professionals in providing End of Life and Palliative Care to patients with life limiting illnesses.

Topics include advance care planning, ethics, pain management and syringe drivers. To find out more information and register, please see [here](#).