

# Job Interview Preparation for Healthcare Pros

Reading time:

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It is important to present yourself as confident and calm. Good preparation is key. This will help you avoid some of the pitfalls which can trip you up and make you feel nervous and uncomfortable.

If you've been called to an interview, it is usually because your application had some merit, so take some confidence in this fact. The first questions will likely be along the lines of "What attracted you to this particular role?" or "Tell us about yourself". Since you know the answers to these questions, they can be prepared for in advance. Keep your answer short to about three minutes long. A lengthy history is not appropriate here, but take the opportunity to tell your potential employer succinctly about your relevant professional experience and the reason you've applied for the job.

## Before any interview

### Research

All you have to do is 'Google' and you will be able to check websites, annual reports, social media pages and news items if applicable. If you can demonstrate some knowledge of the size, nature of the healthcare and history, this is worthwhile. It's going to vary greatly between a large and small clinics but either way, a little knowledge will illustrate a level of interest in the role. Research also helps you evaluate if you want to work with a particular organisation and if their values align with yours.

# Read the position description

This is so important! Check all essential criteria and ensure the job on offer matches your skills and experience.

## Know your strengths

The competing applicants will no doubt have a similar healthcare degree as you, so you have to offer the employer something beyond your primary healthcare qualification. If you can demonstrate an interest in something the hospital or clinic does, this gives them reason to consider you over another applicant.

Speak with any practitioners you know at the hospital or clinic to which you're applying to find out what skills, knowledge or services they are offering. For example, if you found out a particular hospital had a special community program for patients whose only language is Mandarin and you speak Mandarin – it would be worthwhile highlighting both facts on your application to demonstrate how you can assist the hospital. Be broad in your consideration, other examples where appropriate may be:

- You previously did clinical placement at the hospital and enjoyed it
- Clinic does some minor cosmetic work and you've done some extra CPD in this area
- Clinic performs orthodontic work and your father was an orthodontist (in fact any healthcare background in the family may be well regarded)
- You did some of your research at university in gastroenterology and the hospital is considered a specialist for this area of practice

## Prepare some questions

Prepare a few questions to ask at the conclusion of the interview. You can have these written down and refer to them when the opportunity arises (this shows you have prepared). An interview isn't necessarily a one-way street of conversation, it's also an opportunity for you to get to know the organisation. Questions need to be selected carefully, not sounding too trivial or upfront. Whether there is a coffee machine may be important to you, but the interviewer won't be impressed. NEVER raise the issue of pay, but rather wait until your interviewer (inevitably) brings it up. Be sure to ensure your questions aren't available in literature or on the website as this will show a lack of preparation and due diligence.

- What are the key challenges in the first few weeks and months of the role?
- Do you have any concerns about my experience, education, skills?

Having said that, you don't necessarily need to ask questions! If your queries have already been answered during the interview, don't be afraid to say that you had a number of questions prepared but we have covered them during our discussion.

## Present well

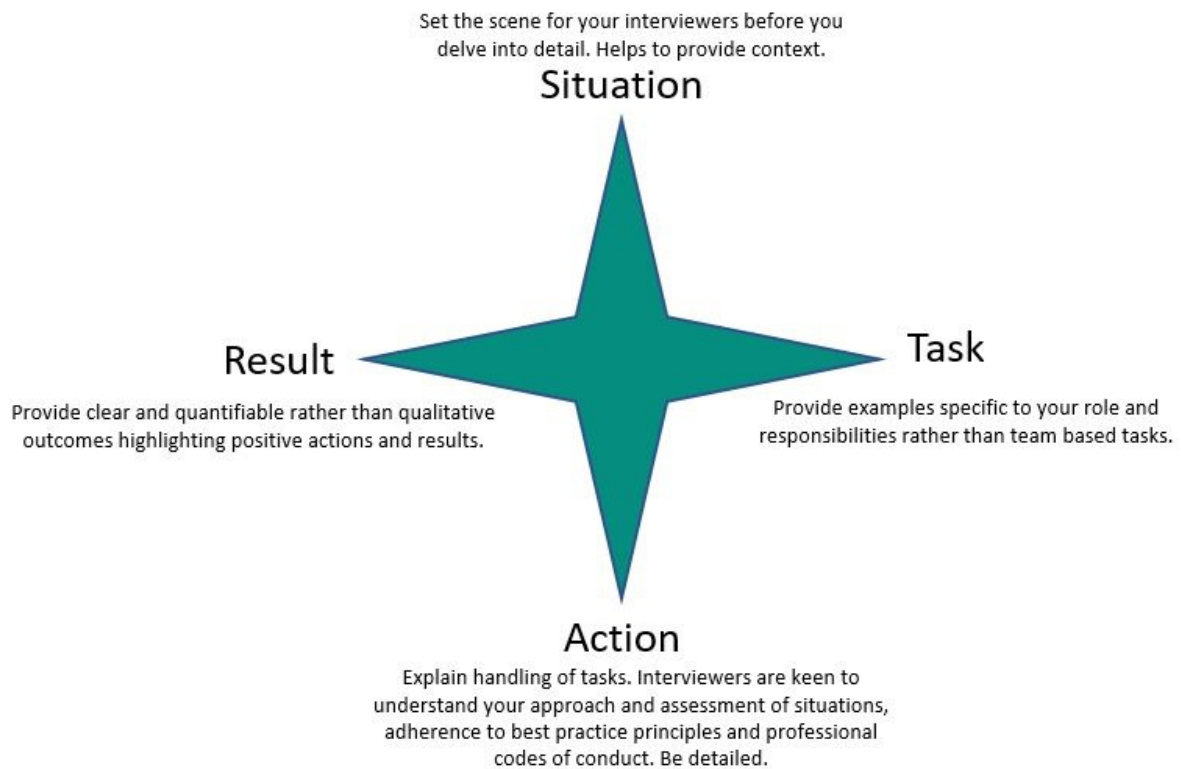
It is likely that you know the dress code of the employer, but it pays to always err on the side of dressing up than dressing down.

## Be punctual

Being late will stress you out and is a big red flag for employers. If you are going to be late, call ahead to inform them you are running late. However, being late does not bode well and in a competitive environment you can almost guarantee this will dent your application's likelihood of success. Plan your trip so you know if you are taking public transport, driving or walking and you should arrive 15 to 30 minutes early. If you are driving, work out where you are going to park before you depart.

## STAR technique for responding to competency focused questions

The STAR interview response technique can help. Using this method of answering interview questions lets you provide concrete examples or proof that you possess the experience and skills for the job at hand. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result



## When you get to an interview you should:

### Smile and be enthusiastic

Don't feel enthusiastic, be enthusiastic with your voice and body language. Look people in the eye, smile broadly when you first meet your interviewers and provide a firm handshake. A good tip when you shake hands is to consciously remove the focus from saying your name and try to remember their name so you can address your interviewers by their name during the interview and when you say goodbye.

### Give specific examples

This is a big issue for some applicants who don't listen well. If the interviewer asks you a specific question that requests an example, you shouldn't respond generically. For example, "Can you give us an example of how you've handled an abusive patient?" Difficult patients and difficult colleagues are likely to be areas where you might be asked for examples, so these are easier areas to prepare. In these cases the interviewer will be looking for how you followed a process and managed to keep working with a colleague or treating a patient when they were difficult. It wouldn't reflect well on you if you have a difficult patient and you simply ignored them rather than dealt with the issue.

## Some common questions you may face

### Why are you interested in this job? OR What brought you here today?

Tip: Think of at least one thing that means you had a special interest in this job over other jobs. Alternatively, think of one personal trait or experience you have that relates to this job that others are unlikely to have.

### What would you say are your greatest strengths?

**Tip:** Don't come across as arrogant. No doubt you possess multiple strengths but if the question is this direct, they are likely only looking for two or three. You could also ask if they'd like you to continue but six is a reasonable limit.

## What do you think are your biggest weaknesses?

**Tip:** Unless you're specifically asked this, don't volunteer your weak points. When asked this, it's good to be honest but you should select weaknesses which your employer will see as things you can work and develop. For example, a technical skill such as insert cannulas or taking dental moulds may be something you've had trouble with in the past but you know you can improve with experience and technique.

## Where do you see yourself in five years?

**Tip:** Don't be afraid to tell your employer you've got hopes and dreams. They know you won't be employed with them forever. Your ambitions will impress in most cases provided you don't give the impression you'll be running away in just a year after employment. If the job you are applying for is a neat stepping stone to your dream, this will be easy for the employer to understand. For example if you dream of doing a speciality in say anaesthesia or orthodontics and you know you'll get experience in this role, then that's a clear link your employer will understand.

## The Dos and Don'ts for any job interview

- Express yourself clearly
- Show confidence – after all you applied for the role as you think you can do it
- Direct your answer to the person who asked you – many interviews for healthcare professionals are panel based so be prepared to address each individual
- Listen carefully
- Ask questions - this should be a two way conversation, but at the same time, let the interviewer guide the process
- Don't ask about salary, bonus or holidays in your first interview – you'll have more power in the second interview anyway, plus it makes you look more interested in the money than the work
- Don't criticise former fellow employees – it makes you look like you'd be hard to work alongside
- Don't lie
- Don't over-answer – try to get a feel for the interviewer and let them guide the interview
- Don't answer with single words

## Second interviews

These are both harder and easier. Easier in the sense that you know they are interested but harder as you know it won't be skin deep. Since they now have some familiarity with your experience to date they may ask more specific questions about the tasks you performed. This is where the STAR technique comes in handy.

You should be prepared for questions that target how competently you can handle a situation and immediate follow up questions asking for more detail. For example:

- When you had a patient that demanded a certain treatment, how did you respond?
  - And how did the patient reply?
- Describe a time when you had to make a quick decision about a patient's treatment?
  - And what was the outcome?
- Have you ever made an unpopular decision that was benefited the patient?
  - And what did your colleagues say about it afterwards?

Remember, refer to the STAR technique for guidance.

Your interviewers may also ask difficult questions to ascertain 'soft' skills such as your ability to be a team player. They may ask these directly, eg "How do you feel you work in a team?" or "Provide an example of when you worked successfully in a team". Either way, you should refer to the STAR technique and provide examples.

## Salary

This is difficult for most people and both the question and answer can seem crude. Be mindful of a few things:

1. Get a feel for the market and what people in this position are earning. For hospital based roles that are advertised as PGY4 or similar, this is fairly easy to get online and Government roles are set within minimum and maximum limits.
  2. Remember that payment should be commensurate with experience, so don't expect the top of the bracket or above the average if you have low experience compared to other applicants.
  3. If you quote a number, be clear about whether this is package or not package, ie does it include superannuation, education supplement etc or not
  4. Be confident and respect yourself as you deserve to earn a reasonable income – you'll be met with respect if you can confidently request a realistic salary.
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