

23 Prepare a curriculum vitae

Eoin O'Brien

*Name, address. Excuse the fantasy.
Photo of the woman I was at twenty.
Marital status: no second finds me the same.
Virgin, mistress, single and married —
Must I conform to a particular brand?*

Patricia McCarthy, *Curriculum Vitae*

I owe a debt of gratitude to a wonderful secretary who once worked in the offices of a Midland dean of postgraduate studies. Having kindly typed my application for a registrar post, she remarked in her characteristically forthright way, "This could belong to any old fool. Let me rewrite it for you". When she presented me with her interpretation of my medical prowess, it took me some time to accept the metamorphosis. I had been given an astute practical lesson. It is, indeed, a sad reflection on our medical schools that we should emerge brimful of matters medical after six years, but untutored in the art of acquiring an appointment—a tedious business that may occupy much of our time. Thanks to my mentor, I am now able to see things from the other side of the fence, and I realise that I was not the only one unable to prepare a curriculum vitae. The standard of CVs submitted for posts at all levels is often abysmally low. At times one is left wondering if the applicant has any schooling in the rudiments of English spelling and writing.

There are many ways of planning a curriculum vitae, and the method proposed here is a personal choice. There are other methods and styles every bit as acceptable. The style chosen, however, should

General and personal

Name

Address

Nationality..... Date of birth..... Family

Interests

General education

Undergraduate career

Medical school

 Date of entry..... Date of graduation.....

Teaching hospitals.....

.....

Distinctions

.....

Postgraduate career

Qualifications

Previous appointments

Present appointment(s)

Career plans

Publications (Papers, abstracts, book chapters, papers in press)

Scientific communications (Full presentations, poster presentations)

Learned societies

Referees

Fig 1 Suggested layout for a curriculum vitae

have order and be neatly laid out. It is important to comply fully with the instructions for applicants; if 20 copies of a curriculum vitae are requested, 20 copies must be submitted, however unreasonable this may seem to the applicant. Likewise, if a photograph is requested, one must be supplied. Applications must reach the right person before the closing date. Allow plenty of time for delays in the post and in the hospital distribution of mail.

General presentation

Many hospital authorities make it difficult for the applicant by providing a totally inadequate application form. The best way of dealing with this problem is to submit your own curriculum vitae (fig 1) and to complete the hospital application form only to draw attention to the appropriate page of the curriculum vitae. Sometimes the application form seeks information that would not normally be

included in the curriculum vitae—for example, previous salaries. The advice of your consultant or a colleague may be invaluable.

Details

Interests

List your general interests. These might be considered under the headings “cultural”, “sporting”, or “recreational”. Any distinctions in these general pursuits should be briefly mentioned—a cap in rugby, for example, or a place in the college or university debating society.

General education

Schools attended, examinations taken with results, and distinctions should be listed briefly.

Undergraduate education

The date of entry to and graduation from medical school, and all honours and distinctions should be listed. It is surprising how often applicants fail to mention an honours in an examination, or a placing in a prize examination. If there has been a genuine reason for failing or postponing an examination, particularly if this has resulted in a delay in graduation, the circumstances should be briefly indicated—for example, family illness preventing the taking of finals on schedule. If, on the other hand, there are no mitigating circumstances, the dates should merely be stated.

Qualifications

List full titles of degrees and fellowships with dates of award.

Previous appointments

Previous appointments should be in chronological order. It is best to put designation of the post on the left side of the page, the tenure on the right, and a summary of experience beneath this, using the unwritten headings “service commitment”, “teaching”, “research”, and “administration” as appropriate to maintain order and to help you to remember past experience.

Senior house officer to

Professor Oblong,
Department of Medicine,
University of Maydell and
St Magdall's Hospital
London

July 1992–June 1993
(12 months)

Professor Oblong was professor of medicine at the University of Maydell. His special interest was gastroenterology. There were 40 general medical beds and 10 gastroenterological beds. The hospital was on-take one night in four and I was on call one night in three. I gained experience in acute medical emergencies, including acute coronary care. I assisted at Professor Oblong's outpatients twice weekly, at which 2000 general medical problems and 2000 gastroenterological problems were seen annually. I was trained in endoscopic procedures, liver and intestinal biopsy techniques, and was competent to perform these procedures without supervision at the end of my appointment.

St Magdall's is a teaching hospital at which 300 medical students attend. I gave two senior and one junior tutorial to the students each week and participated in the professorial department's clinical teaching sessions, which were held three times weekly, and also at the weekly CPC. I gave six lectures to nurses each term and took part in the general practitioner postgraduate luncheon meetings.

I participated in a trial of a new H₂ antagonist, and assisted at experiments to determine the efficacy of the drug on canine gastric secretion. As a result of this work there has been one publication (see publications), and another is being prepared for submission.

Fig 2 Sample entry for previous experience

Present appointment(s)

The layout is similar to that for previous appointments. There may be, or previously have been, more than one post; for example, if one is or was registrar in medicine and tutor to the medical school, deal with each post separately. In the example shown (fig 2) the greater emphasis is on a service commitment. This would not be the case in an application for a research or tutor's post. For more senior posts administrative experience would become relevant.

Publications

Accuracy in listing your publications is important. Interviewers often check publications—more to familiarise themselves with the standard and content of the work than to verify its existence—and, understandably, a poor view will be taken if the publication cannot be located. Full details of publications should be given in the Vancouver style: each author, the full title, the title of the journal or book, the place of publication and the publisher (books only), the

year, volume, and page numbers. An asterisk may be used to indicate those publications in which your contribution was a major one, and this may be indicated in brackets at the head of the list. When publications become more plentiful in the course of time, they should be classified as original papers, abstracts, editorials or leaders, book chapters, reviews, letters (only those that contribute to the literature should be cited), and miscellaneous writings.

Learned societies and committee membership

Mention not only learned medical societies but also cultural bodies that may indicate your involvement in the arts or community affairs. However, if you do list the Forty Foot Bathers Association, be prepared to expound on the qualities that justify its inclusion as a learned society. Committee membership serves as an indication of your administrative experience, and if you have served as chairperson or secretary this should be stated.

Scientific communications

List scientific communications only if you have personally delivered the address. Presumably, if you are a participant in work being presented by another member of the department, your contribution will be acknowledged when the address is published as an abstract or scientific paper. The full title of the address, and the name, date, and venue of the symposium or meeting should be given. Poster displays at major scientific meetings are often published in abstract form and would therefore appear under the list of publications, but it is reasonable to indicate experience in this form of presentation by putting the title of the poster with the place and date of the meeting followed by a note indicating the appropriate publication. (Avoid the temptation to fatten your curriculum vitae by making one piece of work appear at first glance as a number of separate contributions. It is, however, quite reasonable to indicate the progress of a piece of research through different phases of development, for example, from presentation at a local meeting to presentation, perhaps as a poster, at an international scientific meeting, to publication as an abstract, and finally to full publication as a scientific paper.)

Referees

Referees are essential to all applications for jobs and it is important to choose a referee who will speak well of you. Some doctors have a habit of asking for an open reference on completion of a post but this

Dear . . .

I wish to submit my application for the post of Senior Registrar at St Margaret's Hospital. I enclose a copy of my curriculum vitae and the names of two referees.

Yours sincerely

Fig 3 Sample covering letter

will usually be refused, and if given is not worth the paper it is written on. Permission to use a referee's name should always be sought in writing *before* submitting the application. Occasionally, time does not permit this and a telephone call may have to suffice, but this should be the exception to the rule. Always give referees details of when you worked for them—they may have forgotten all about you! It is a good policy to let each referee have a copy of your curriculum vitae. Also give details of the post for which you are applying, and the likely date of interview (if the referee is away, the secretary will let you or the interview board know). An interview board is not impressed if the named referees have not sent references, and usually the fault rests with the applicant, who has not allowed sufficient time for the preparation, typing and delivery of the reference. Allow at least three weeks between the time of posting a letter of request to your referees and the interview.

Covering letter

A handwritten letter should accompany all applications (fig 3).

Typing and printing

With the advent of the word processor the task of keeping a curriculum vitae up to date has been made much easier. Once a curriculum vitae is on a disk, it can be updated with ease for each job application without the trouble and expense of retyping the entire document. For doctors well advanced in their careers the task of committing what may be a substantial tome to the disk may appear daunting, but as curricula vitae are demanded not only when a change of appointment is contemplated, but also for grant applications, pharmaceutical trials, and membership application for learned societies, the effort will be well rewarded. Moreover, if one's career is productive, it is surprising how easily publications and

achievements are omitted unless they are entered regularly, say on an annual basis.

In the first edition of this book doctors applying for senior posts were advised to have their curricula vitae printed. This expensive exercise is now no longer necessary. With skilful use of the word processor, a tastefully designed and error-free curriculum vitae can be produced inexpensively. A laser or equivalent printer should be used to provide a high-quality typeface. The curriculum vitae can then be photocopied on top quality paper, and for senior appointments the additional small cost of professional photocopying and binding in hard papers is worth while.

Conclusion

Writing a curriculum vitae is a difficult but important task. Do not leave it until the last minute when that friendly secretary you had in mind is the popular choice of your colleagues who are also seeking new jobs. A slovenly curriculum vitae may be judged as the product of a disorderly individual and an indication of performance. If such is not the case, the error for the misconception is entirely one's own; if, on the other hand, the temperament of the applicant is indeed a trifle lacking in discipline and order, the composition of a curriculum vitae may serve as the first exercise in correcting that defect.

HOW TO DO IT: 1

Management/employment/counselling

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