

Scenario: Prisoners Voting

In New Zealand, prisoners are unable to vote. The law used to be that prisoners serving a sentence of three years or more could not vote, but in 2010 this was extended to all those in prison at the time of an election.

Is voting a privilege that prisoners have lost? Should it be the right of all prisoners? What are your thoughts?

Social conscience scenarios are often on social issues in the news during the six months before the interview. This one was topical last year when the election was coming up.

The interviewers will not expect an in-depth response to a scenario like this because you have had only two minutes to think about it. What they are looking for is that you recognise the issue as being debatable and can see arguments on both sides. The kind of qualities the interviewer would be scoring you on would be your sense of social responsibility, your ability to think critically about a topic you could be expected to have a view on, and how well you express it.

The interviewer will ask whether you understand what you have to talk about. Use this as an opportunity to rephrase the scenario it as it will help you to organise your thoughts. First, say whether you think prisoners should vote or should not vote. Start with one argument that supports your point of view, for example “Voting is a basic human right of all citizens, even those in prison” or alternatively, “Voting is a privilege that prisoners have lost temporarily along with their freedom”. If you can, expand on it with something like “We live in a democracy” versus “Only those participating in society should have a say”.

Then, because it is a conversation and not a monologue, give the interviewer the opportunity to either encourage you to continue or present the opposite view. The interviewer may say “Do you think taking away the vote would make prisoners regret their actions and be less likely to reoffend?” or perhaps “Would allowing them to vote them feel more connected to society and aid their rehabilitation?” The interviewer will have enough prompts to keep the conversation going but will not want it to become a question-and-answer session because the less you say, the harder it is to get a sense of what you are like.

Remember that you are not being judged on the “rightness” or “wrongness” of your answer. You and the interviewer will each have a personal point of view shaped by education, social conscience and personal experience – for example, having been a victim of crime or knowing someone who was imprisoned. It is quite likely that you and the interviewer will perceive the issue differently but it is not where you stand that you are being scored, it is the way you discuss the topic and form your opinion. If, as the interview progresses, you find yourself changing your mind then don’t be afraid to say so. By the end you will have had eight minutes to think about the issue, not just two, and being prepared to shift your position shows that you are open to change and have gained something from the conversation. Any interviewer will view this positively.

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Scenario: University Education

A school friend knows that you want to be a health professional but questions the value of a University education. Speak to your friend, who is in the room.

There are a number of ways the MMI uses the Interactive station. The aim of this scenario is to see whether you can justify taking a path you have chosen. How you go about it will give the interviewer a sense of your self-awareness, your commitment to being a health professional, your quality of argument and your skills of persuasion. These are the attributes you can expect to be scored on.

The actor is not there to defeat you in an argument. You can assume that as a school friend he or she will acknowledge and respect your contrary point of view and it is important that you reciprocate. The actor's job is to create as realistic a situation as possible in which you are having to affirm your position on University education in the face of a challenge.

The actor may start by suggesting that many people succeed without University degrees and that even those with them can end up unemployed. Learning a trade would be better. Your response might be that graduates have better employment opportunities. The actor may say that you'll be crippled by your student loan, to which you might reply that you'll be making enough in your career to pay it off. There may be a suggestion that University indoctrinates rather than educates, whereas you might see it as providing networking opportunities and exposure to many career options.

Don't allow the conversation to get heated. If you are aggressive, expect the actor to respond in kind and the chances of a constructive outcome will diminish. If you show that you are reasonable and willing to listen, the actor will reciprocate and you are much more likely to find common ground. Letting emotion run high will not help you and may unsettle you for the later stations. The purpose of the two minutes chat at the end is to "normalise" the situation so that you don't go out flustered, but it is better not to get worked up in the first place.

Another use of the interactive scenario is to put you in a situation that you might normally avoid, for example having to speak to a parent out cycling with a child and neither wearing a helmet. This is to take you out of your comfort zone and see how you cope. The interviewer will be assessing your ability to resolve conflict, understand someone else's point of view and communicate effectively. A combative approach will draw the same from the actor whereas a measured and respectful one will be met with a more positive response and may lead to a solution. That is what the interviewer wants to see you achieve.

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Scenario: Animal Testing

Animals are often used for scientific or commercial testing of drugs. Some people oppose this practice whilst others believe it is justified. What are your thoughts?

The Moral/Ethical station will be about an issue the interviewer expects an aspiring health professional to have a view on, although not necessarily an expert one. The idea is not to find out how much you know about animal testing but to see whether you can recognise a moral/ethical dilemma, appreciate both sides of the argument and discuss it from the perspective of someone in whose intended career a debate like this actually matters. The attributes the interviewer would be assessing in this station will include ethical/moral reasoning, quality of argument, self-awareness, social responsibility and communication.

As with the Social Conscience station, decide whether you are for or against the idea and come up with a reason or two – for example, “When ethical consideration prevents the use of human subjects there is no adequate alternative” versus “Animals are different from humans and do not necessarily predict results in humans, which makes them poor test subjects”. Bring the interviewer into the conversation early and let the discussion open up into issues such as animals’ rights or the high cost of animal research, or perhaps whether you would think the same about animal testing for cosmetics as you do for drugs.

Again, don’t be concerned if you run out of things to say because the interviewer will use prompts to keep the conversation flowing. He or she wants you to debate the issue intelligently, not just answer “yes” or “no”. As with other stations in which you are being asked to express an opinion don’t require too much prompting because it will hold you back from showcasing your ability. If your personal view differs from the interviewer’s you won’t be marked down for it because the interviewer is assessing your personal qualities, not your beliefs.

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Scenario: Non-academic Interest

Do you think that non-academic hobbies or pastimes can add to a person's ability to be good health professional? Can you think of an example in your case?

There are many ways of asking you why you want to be a health professional. Some questions aim to find out what professionalism means to you, others want to establish whether you have thought about the pros and cons of a health career, and some enquire as to what your goals and aspirations might be. This one is asking how you think an activity that you do now will complement what you intend to be doing in the future. In the Career Choice station the interviewer is assessing your career motivation, usually your self-awareness, often your creativity, and invariably how you are going to take care of yourself on the long road ahead.

What the interviewer is looking in this scenario is that you realise that the health professions are not just scientific, they are people-based so health practitioners need to be well-rounded people who can relate to others. Non-scientific pursuits can help you achieve this, and to connect with patients who don't have a deep scientific understanding of their health situations but can relate to something you both have an interest in.

You do need to have an out-of-study hobby or pastime to discuss, because the interviewer will expect you to talk enthusiastically about it and will soon know if you are not actively involved. It could be playing music or sport, painting, dance, handcrafts, or anything else that has some characteristic you think would help you grow as a health professional. Sport, for example, encourages teamwork and leadership whereas playing a musical instrument requires concentration and dexterity. These skills have obvious relevance to the health professions.

You should also convey to the interviewer your understanding that a non-academic interest is important for stress relief and a healthy work-life balance whilst you are studying and working, but that owing to time and other constraints there may have to be compromises. The interviewer may ask how you would go about prioritising when there are competing interests. It doesn't really matter what you say as long as the importance of maintaining an appropriate balance between work and relaxation shows through. Focusing too much on non-academic pursuits at the expense of study, or dismissing them as irrelevant, would indicate a lack of such balance and would likely earn you a lower score.

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Scenario: Alternative Medicines

Alternative (or complementary) medicine refers to any therapeutic approach that does not fall within the realm of conventional medicine. They are used by about half of the adult population in the developed world, yet firm proof for the effects many popular alternative therapies are claimed to have is lacking.

Do you think that alternative medicines pose a threat to health?

In this station you will be asked to talk about a health care issue, usually something of topical interest and probably in the news around the time the question was set. The interviewer is not assessing your depth of knowledge but will expect you to know enough about the topic to be able to form an opinion and express it. The attributes being tested will depend on the nature of the scenario, for example some have a moral/ethical dimension and others are more about social conscience. Or, you may be asked to interpret a graph showing dental decay rates in children or comment on statistics about obesity.

This scenario is about the use of alternative versus conventional medicines. Begin by offering an opinion one way or the other, and if you change your mind halfway through once you have thought about it more or heard another perspective, don't be embarrassed to say so. That happens all the time in the health professions, as interviewers know very well, and one of the things they may be looking for is whether you can be flexible in your thinking.

You could say that many people find alternative medicines more effective than conventional ones, or alternatively, argue that all they do is offer false hope and discourage people from seeking proven remedies that might help them. With the interviewer's participation you could broaden the discussion into whether it is safe to take untested remedies of dubious origin, or fair to deny people who prefer a more holistic approach to their health care than conventional medicine offers. You might consider whether the pharmaceutical industry sees complementary medicines as a threat. The interviewer may want to know if you, as a health professional, can see a place for offering both alternative and conventional treatments.

As with the other stations, this is your stage but if you want to score well a conversation works better than a monologue and is less stressful. Be aware, also, that if the interviewer interrupts your flow it may be because you have either drifted off the point or are being guided to where you are more likely to display the attributes being scored. Let the interviewer prompt you occasionally but turn each one of them into a talking point, and that way you will both feel engaged and feel at the end that the dialogue was worthwhile.

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Scenario: Dealing with Stress

A study from the American College Health Association reported that 75% of students are stressed and nearly all say they are anxious (Levine and Dean, 2012). What are your tactics for dealing with times of stress and anxiety?

If you are aware of your own strengths and weaknesses, you are better equipped to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of people in your care. It also helps you to recognise aspects of a career in health that you might struggle with and to think about how you might overcome these challenges.

In the Personal Insight scenario you will be asked to talk about your personal qualities, interests, ambitions or inspirations. It is a good idea to have in mind some examples of things you do well and others not so well. Don't be too modest or self-conscious to talk about them, firstly because the interviewer is just like you only older and also does some things well and others badly, and second, because the next question will be about how you make your strengths work for you and how you compensate for your weaknesses. You might be asked how you express your creative side or to discuss your personal development plan. The point of this station is to make you reflect on what defines you as a person and how it may help or hinder you in your intended career as a health professional.

The scenario is about coping with stress as a student, something you will already be doing. Think of some sources of stress in your study and your life, explain how they affect you, how you manage them and how effective you think you deal with them. You might suggest that engaging in healthy activities and getting the right care and support can put problems in perspective and help stressful feelings subside. This could include eating well, exercising regularly, listening to music or talking to others, or perhaps avoiding stressful people and knowing when to say "no". It is better to give examples than talk in generalities because specifics reveal more about you. It is very likely that the interviewer would ask you what problems stress may cause to a health professional and expect you to have some insight into that. Attributes commonly assessed in this station include self-awareness, creativity, and self-care.

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Scenario: Team Role

Modern day healthcare is very much a team effort. Think of a role that you have played in the team. What was your contribution? What did it teach you about team working?

Many people find the Personal Experience station less challenging than the others because it is asking you to discuss something you have actually done, not what you might do. The rationale is that if you coped well with an experience in the past you will probably do so again when faced with the challenges as a student and practising health professional. Or, you may not have coped well but you learnt something from it and if faced with the same situation again you would probably do things differently. The experience the interviewer may ask you to describe might be a positive or negative one, the point being that life's lessons must be learned regardless of whether the outcome is good or bad. If you have to describe a negative one please don't choose the worst thing that ever happened to you and have yet to get over, because upset people do not interview well at this station or any subsequent one.

The principles underpinning this scenario are that effective leadership and teamwork are vital to the delivery of healthcare, and that good team members recognise not only their own strengths and weaknesses but also those of others. The way it is structured allows you to talk about any team activity you were involved in, whether you were a leader or a follower, and how much or how little you participated. There may have been harmony or conflict in the team and you may have found the outcome rewarding or unsatisfying. Irrespective of the situation you choose to discuss, the interviewer will expect you to describe the setting and the part you played, what you learnt and how it contributed to your personal growth. Inevitably, you will be asked how the lessons the experience taught you might assist you as a health professional. The interviewer may want you to discuss what makes a good leader, or team dynamics, or the strategies you would use to resolve a disagreement. Conflict resolution, teamwork, communication and self-awareness are some of the attributes you can expect to be scored on in this station.

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Scenario: Housing Crisis

A lack of affordable housing is leading to many Māori whānau/families across Aotearoa New Zealand needing emergency housing options. Some Māori whānau are now sleeping in their cars. What are the factors that have contributed to this housing crisis for Māori communities in particular?

Hauora Māori crosses all stations. You could be asked to discuss a social conscience issue, a current health topic or an ethical/moral concern that has relevance to Māori health. The interviewer will expect you to be aware that inequities exist between the health care of Māori and non-Māori and to be able to articulate some of the reasons for this. The attributes likely to be assessed in this station include cultural safety, critical thinking, social responsibility, ethical moral reasoning and quality of argument.

This scenario could apply to all New Zealanders, of course, but the interviewer is looking to see whether you understand that socio-economic realities differ between Māori and non-Māori, and that because Māori are more likely to live in deprived areas and have lower income they are at greater risk of financial hardship. This means that Māori are more likely to rent than buy, and given the shortage and high cost of rental housing are at greater risk of becoming homeless. The conversation may then turn to whether ethnic bias within the rental housing market creates an additional barrier to access by Māori.

Should you agree that discrimination exists in that setting the interviewer may ask whether you think it could influence decision-making by health professionals also, leading to a lower standard of care and poorer health outcomes for Māori. Whatever the scenario, the likelihood is that the interviewer will guide you to this central issue and presume that you will have some ideas about how to address the inequities between Māori and non-Māori healthcare that do exist.

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