

Webinar Notes – Portfolio Masterclass

How to Max Out as a Medic in 2026

Speaker: Marwan Tahoun

1. Portfolio Requirements Overview

Marwan began by emphasising that a medical career is not linear, with several pathways available alongside the traditional training route. These include academia and research, entrepreneurship (such as MedTech and innovation), and voluntary or global health work, including organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières.

Despite these options, the traditional pathway remains the foundation. Competition ratios are currently at an all-time high across specialties, largely due to COVID-related backlogs and increased numbers of graduates.

Pressingly, portfolio expectations vary by specialty. For example, psychiatry is largely MSRA-based, obstetrics and gynaecology require MSRA plus interview, while other specialties such as ophthalmology involve MSRA followed by portfolio assessment and interview. Understanding these differences early is essential.

2. Research Strategy

Research was highlighted as one of the most important yet time-intensive aspects of portfolio building, often taking several months before meaningful progress or decisions are seen.

Systematic reviews were recommended as a starting point. They represent a high level of evidence, can be completed independently using university access, and are generally more achievable to publish than other study types. Importantly, they allow the researcher full control over the process.

A key concept introduced was that of “research gatekeepers”, individuals who can facilitate access to strong research opportunities. The suggested approach involves demonstrating value early by carrying out preliminary work, then reaching out with a concise proposal consisting of a one-page summary alongside a clear methodology. Rather than cold calling per se, it shows you have critically thought and from a tutor point of view can be seen as an opportunity rather than additional work. Targeting well-published academics and showing initiative through early groundwork was strongly encouraged.

3. Teaching & Presentations

Teaching opportunities are widely available, even at F1 level, but it is essential to formally evidence involvement through feedback collection and supervisor sign-off. Getting involved

early in medical school can do wonders. With a plethora of societies available the opportunity to teach is apparent. But even if there is a society which does not fit the ideas you have, there is also the option to birth your own society as Marwan has done.

Case reports were highlighted as a practical and effective way to gain presentations, particularly because they are engaging and relatively accessible. Presentation scoring typically increases with scale, with regional, national, and international levels carrying progressively greater weight. Many specialties use cumulative scoring, meaning smaller contributions can still build a strong overall portfolio.

4. Audit & Quality Improvement

Audit and QIP work was described as one of the most straightforward components to complete.

Standard Audit Cycle:

1. Identify a clinical guideline
2. Measure current compliance
3. Present findings
4. Implement change/improvement
5. Re-audit to complete the cycle

Hospitals provide support through audit departments, and presenting work at departmental meetings is standard practice. Taking on leadership roles, such as coordinating projects or supervising others, can significantly strengthen this section of the portfolio.

5. Specialty-Specific Considerations

Intercalated degrees no longer contribute significantly to most specialty applications. Higher degrees such as MDs or PhDs require time out of training, making part-time options like master's degrees or PgCerts more practical for many trainees.

Academic Clinical Fellowships offer protected research time during training, along with funding opportunities through organisations such as the National Institute for Health and Care Research, and the possibility of pursuing a funded PhD. However, these posts are competitive. It was also noted that allocation for the Specialised Foundation Programme is now largely randomised.

6. PathwayMD Platform (The Ultimate UK Doctor Recruitment Guide)

Marwan introduced PathwayMD, a platform designed to centralise specialty portfolio requirements and simplify tracking progress. It will include tools for monitoring development, specialty-matching quizzes, and detailed guidance for each pathway. The platform is not yet fully launched, but early access will be available via email sign-up.

