

University of Bristol

MBChB Programme Policies and Procedures

GUIDANCE ON THE APPROPRIATE USE OF MOBILE PHONES IN CLINICAL AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Introduction

Mobile phones are useful tools for communication and accessing information. However, their use in clinical and learning settings must be managed carefully to maintain professionalism, patient confidentiality, and an effective learning environment. Decisions regarding mobile phone use are often context dependent. When deciding whether the use of a mobile phone is appropriate, students should consider whether they would be able to justify that use as professional, necessary and proportionate if reviewed by a professional practice panel. Below are some guidelines on how this might be judged.

General Principles

Professionalism: Always use your mobile phone in a manner that reflects the professionalism expected of a medical student. This includes being respectful of patients, peers, and staff.

Confidentiality: Never use your mobile phone to take photos, videos, or audio recordings of patients or their information, unless you have been given exceptional prior authorisation by both the supervising clinician and the patient. Such circumstances are exceptional and would require clear prior authorisation.

Distraction-Free Learning: Ensure that your mobile phone use does not disrupt your learning or that of others. This includes silencing notifications and avoiding non-educational use during lectures, seminars, and clinical placements.

Guidance on the appropriate use of mobile phones in clinical and learning environments

Updated August 2026, Dr D Rogers (Co- Programme Director)

Transparency and Communication: The educational purpose of mobile phone use is not always apparent to others. Tutors and clinical staff may reasonably interpret mobile phone use as disengagement unless its purpose has been made clear. Therefore, if you plan to use your mobile in a learning environment, please discuss this with your tutor beforehand. For example, you might say, "I find it really useful to access clinical guidance and make notes during teaching sessions to keep me focused. I hope this is OK to do during your tutorial? I will only be looking up educational resources."

Clinical Settings

Patient Interaction: Do not use your mobile phone during patient interactions unless it is directly related to patient care, and you have obtained prior permission from the supervising clinician and the patient.

Emergency Situations: Where an urgent personal matter arises, or where mobile phone use may be required in relation to patient care, students should follow the guidance of the supervising clinician.

Breaks and Downtime: Use your mobile phone during designated breaks or downtime, ensuring you are in a private area away from patients and clinical activities.

Learning Environments

Lectures and Seminars: Use your mobile phone for educational purposes only, such as accessing lecture materials or taking notes. Ensure it is on silent mode to avoid disruptions.

Group Work: Be mindful of your mobile phone use during group work. Prioritise face-to-face communication and collaboration with your peers.

Examinations: Mobile phones should be turned off and stored away during all assessments.

Examples of Poor Practice

A small group of students burst into laughter during a formal lecture. As this disrupted the session, they were asked to explain what happened and mentioned they had been sharing a humorous YouTube video. The sharing of humorous videos is not a problem, but doing this during a lecture is not appropriate.

[Guidance on the appropriate use of mobile phones in clinical and learning environments](#)

A student was seen using their phone in the delivery suite while a baby was being born. The parents complained that they had not agreed to the use of a phone and were concerned that inappropriate images would be shared. The use of mobile phones in delivery suites, operating theatres and other sensitive clinical environments requires caution. To protect both patients and students, mobile phones should not be used in these settings unless there are a clear educational or clinical purpose and explicit agreement from all relevant parties.

Examples of Good Practice

The lecturer puts up a QR code to link to a Mentimeter question, and students scan this code on their phones to share their views on a topic, which enhances the learning in the session.

A student who is consulting in a GP setting is asked by the patient if the drug they are taking is good for gout. The student does not recognise the name of the drug and wonders if the patient is giving them a brand name rather than the generic name. The student explains they would like to check which drug is sold by that name on their phone so they can then go and check with their tutor if this is appropriate.

A student is asked to consult with a patient in a hospital ward to achieve one of their workplace-based assessments. They approach the patient and ask for permission to discuss their condition and mention that when it is completed, they will present their findings to the tutor. The marking process will be done on their electronic portfolio, so they will need to use their phone at this stage to record the tutor's marks and comments.

Conclusion

Adhering to these guidelines will help ensure that mobile phone use in clinical and learning settings is appropriate and professional. If you are uncertain whether a particular use of your mobile phone is appropriate, seek advice from your supervising clinician, tutor or placement supervisor before proceeding.