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The selection of medical students is an important issue causing much debate. The most competitive UK medical schools have many more applicants than places, almost all with the highest possible previous and predicted grades. There are also applicants with non-UK qualifications to consider.

The BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) was designed to aid in the student selection process by providing additional evidence to examinations and interviews. It was known as the MVAT (Medical and Veterinary Admissions Test) prior to 2003. It measures scientific knowledge, academic skills (problem solving and critical thinking) and written communication: factors that medical admissions tutors regard as important to course success.

Results from the first four years of the test (2000 to 2003) were matched to the examination results of those accepted onto the medical course at the University of Cambridge. Correlation and logistic regression analyses on each cohort revealed that the test predicts medical course performance into the clinical years of study but does not predict the observer-rated aspects of the clinical course.

In conclusion, the BMAT identifies important differences in skills between high-attaining candidates that predict their course performance. It can also provide an objective basis for comparing candidates from different countries and educational backgrounds.