

# Explore FAMILY MEDICINE

... A Roadmap for Your Future



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

# MANY THANKS

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## SHOULD I CHOOSE A CAREER IN MEDICINE?

One of the most important decisions that you will ever make is the choice of a career. If you are reading this guide, it is probably because you would like more information about becoming a physician. Maybe your interest has been sparked by contact with a family member who is a physician or by your own experiences with a physician. Although many students enter college wanting to become physicians, most students have very little real knowledge of what is involved in the practice of medicine. They know that physicians have better than average incomes, that medicine is a highly respected profession and that an opportunity exists for service to others. You may be asking yourself if this career would be right for you.

Getting admitted to medical school and becoming a physician is no easy task, but just because it is difficult does not mean that it is impossible. Every year, more than 20,000 students are accepted to medical school. These highly motivated students choose to pursue a career that is intellectually challenging, financially secure, and very rewarding. Competition for admission to medical school is very intense. Students must complete the advanced science courses and score well on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) as well as fulfill other requirements just to be competitive. Thousands of very bright students apply for admission to medical school each year with only about one-third of those actually gaining admission.

## Benefits of Working in Health Care

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the health care industry is the largest industry in the U.S., with more than 13 million people working in health care jobs. About 92 percent of wage and salary jobs were in private industry; the rest were in state and local government hospitals. Health care jobs are found throughout the country, but they are concentrated in the largest states — in particular, California, New York, Florida, Texas, and Pennsylvania. Workers in health care tend to be older than workers in other industries. Health care workers require a high level of education and training to be competent and up-to-date with the developments in their field. (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs035.htm> retrieved March 2009).

Physicians will continue to be in demand as the health care field continues to rapidly grow. Physicians continue to be very well-compensated financially, with physicians' starting salaries more than double the average salary for U.S. workers. Whether taking care of patients in the office or the hospital, teaching students, serving as administrative chiefs of health care systems, or performing medical research, physicians are leaders in health care.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)**

### **What types of physicians are needed?**

While all types of physicians are needed to care for the health of the public, primary care physicians are crucial, especially in underserved areas. A health care system built on an adequate supply of primary care physicians is shown to improve health outcomes and reduce costs. Primary care specialties include: family medicine, general internal medicine, and pediatrics. As providers of more primary care than any other discipline in the U.S., the need for family physicians continues to grow.

### **What is the course of study?**

A conventional medical school requires four years of study. The first two years, called the preclinical years, are spent primarily in classroom and laboratory settings studying basic medical sciences. The first year concentrates on the healthy human body with classes in anatomy, biochemistry, physiology, and other courses. The second year emphasizes human disease with courses such as pathology, infectious diseases, and pharmacology. Courses to discuss medical ethics, interviewing patients, and how to do a physical exam are completed throughout the first and second years of medical school.

The third and fourth years of medical school are spent working with patients in a clinical setting under the supervision of experienced physicians. During the third year of medical school, students begin basic required clerkships that cover a wide variety of medical specialties such as family medicine, surgery, pediatrics, internal medicine, psychiatry/neurology, and obstetrics/gynecology. The fourth year is a continuation of clinical training. Most programs provide elective opportunities for students to gain experience in a considered specialty.

The U.S. Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE), frequently referred to as the “Board” exam, is the licensure exam that all allopathic students must successfully pass in order to receive their medical license. At the end of the second year of medical school, all students take Step 1 of the USMLE. Most schools require passing scores before beginning the 3rd year clinical clerkships. Step 2 of the USMLE is taken towards the end of the 4th year. Many schools require successful completion of Step 2 for graduation. Step 3 is taken towards the end of the first year of residency training.

### **Is medical school difficult?**

There is considerable stress on most medical students. The greatest stress is probably due to the workload. Most medical students agree that the amount of material required during the first two years of preclinical study is double that of their undergraduate workload.

During the clinical years, pressure generated by constantly working with people who are sick, and often dying, is emotionally difficult for many students. Seeing death first-hand makes most students much more aware of their own mortality, sometimes leading to emotional pressures.

There is pressure and uncertainty as medical students compete for a spot in a good residency program, and there are the physical and psychological demands made by very long hours of hard work. These demands do not cease upon completion of residency training as those who are familiar with the long hours required for the successful practice of medicine can testify. Such stresses are often difficult for the spouse of a medical student. Additionally, many are unable or unwilling to accept the fact that the demands of the profession must often take precedence over the social needs of the family. It takes an exceptional spouse to adjust to this fact. Bottom line: It takes a highly motivated individual to pursue a career in medicine.

### **Is medical school expensive?**

Financing a costly medical education is often an additional stress. The national average debt for medical students is more than \$100,000, and the cost of tuition continues to rise. (source: Association of American Medical Colleges, March 2009).

While medical education is expensive, it is an investment in a very promising and rewarding career. Physicians can expect a better than average income after completing many years of training and tight budgets. The average starting salary for family physicians is greater than \$140,000 — more than the average debt accumulated over four years of medical school. If you choose a career in primary care, there are many loan forgiveness and loan repayment programs available. The AAFP also maintains a listing of programs that send physicians to areas of the country where physicians are most needed. To learn about funding resources for practicing in underserved areas, visit [www.aafp.org/online/en/home/clinical/publichealth/culturalprof/underserved.html](http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/clinical/publichealth/culturalprof/underserved.html).

Keep in mind that 90 percent of medical school students incur some type of student loans to finance their education. Wise medical students will develop a relationship with an informed financial advisor who can advise them on loan repayment options, grants, scholarships, and debt management.

For more information, check out the AAFP’s Debt Management Guide at [www.aafp.org/online/en/home/publications/otherpubs/debtmgmt.html](http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/publications/otherpubs/debtmgmt.html).

## What if I am not sure about a career in medicine?

If you have doubts about whether or not you should continue in pre-medicine, you should keep your options open. Medicine is not for everyone, and there are few successful physicians who have not at some time questioned whether or not the rewards are worth the long years of training, cost, and hard work required. Nevertheless, most physicians cannot imagine themselves in any other profession. People who enter the medical profession to make a great deal of money will likely be very disappointed in their career choice over the long run. Most physicians find that medicine is an honorable profession that requires talent and dedication to practice competently and compassionately. Being able to positively impact patients' health is much more rewarding than the lifestyle or the paycheck.

The decision whether or not to stay in pre-medicine can probably be deferred through the first two years of college without loss of credit when changing to another major. The suggested program during the first two years consists primarily of courses that can be applied to many degree programs. Students who make a real effort to learn more about the career will be able to decide if medicine is what they wish to pursue. Students who make an uninformed, premature commitment to medicine often feel trapped by circumstances. An objective of this guide is to prevent this from happening to you.

## CONSIDER A CAREER IN FAMILY MEDICINE

### What is Family Medicine?

Family medicine's cornerstone is an ongoing, personal patient physician relationship focusing on integrated care. Unlike other specialties that are limited to a particular organ, disease, age or sex, family medicine integrates care for patients of both genders across the full spectrum of ages within the context of community, and advocates for the patient in an increasingly complex health care system.

The specialty of family medicine was created in 1969 to provide generalist care for patients and communities. Since its creation nearly four decades ago, the specialty has provided personal, front-line medical care to people of all socioeconomic strata and in all regions of the U.S.. Today, family physicians provide the majority of care for America's underserved rural and urban populations.

## Communities with a Family Physician are Healthier!

Every day, family physicians are making a difference in their communities, improving access to medical care, and caring for patients and their families. Doctors trained in family medicine learn to care for the whole person, physically and emotionally, throughout life. Family physicians work across the U.S., in urban inner cities, in rural counties, and everywhere in between. Recent evidence shows that communities with a family physician are healthier than communities that do not.

Providing patients with a personal medical home, family physicians deliver a range of acute, chronic, and preventive medical care services. Besides diagnosing and treating illness, family physicians provide preventive care, including routine check ups, health-risk assessments, immunization and screening tests, and personalized counseling on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Family physicians also manage chronic illness, often coordinating care provided by other subspecialists. From heart disease, stroke and hypertension, to diabetes, cancer, asthma, and HIV disease, family physicians provide primary care for the nation's most serious health problems. Many family physicians deliver babies and perform surgical procedures. Most take care of all members of the family, including infants and seniors, and many have a special interest in end-of-life care. Family physicians work in offices, in hospitals, in home care and hospice care, in academic centers and research facilities, and in local public health clinics and community agencies. Family physicians have been medical astronauts and Surgeon General of the United States.

If you are looking for a challenging and rewarding career that empowers you to make a difference in your community, you should consider family medicine.

### TOP 6 REASONS TO BECOME A FAMILY PHYSICIAN

1. Promote healthy behavior and provide care for people within the community.
2. Family physicians are in demand by hospital recruiters, community health centers, and by patients who need a committed, caring physician to provide their care.
3. Develop long-lasting relationships with patients and their families.
4. The opportunity to care for patients of all ages, men and women, in a variety of care settings and treating a wide variety of illnesses and concerns.
5. Focus on disease prevention and maintenance of health. Family physicians like to see their patients healthy!
6. Develop skills that can be used anywhere including underserved communities, in the wake of natural and man-made disasters, and on international medical missions.



## Educational Requirements of Family Physicians

Because of their extensive training, family physicians are the only specialists qualified to treat most ailments and provide comprehensive health care for people of all ages from newborns to seniors. Like other medical specialists, family physicians complete a three-year residency program after graduating from medical school. As part of their residency, they participate in integrated inpatient and outpatient learning and receive training in six major medical areas: pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, internal medicine, psychiatry and neurology, surgery, and community medicine. They also receive instruction in many other areas including geriatrics, emergency medicine, ophthalmology, radiology, orthopedics, otolaryngology, and urology.

The goal of family medicine training is to be expert in providing over 90 percent of the health care needs of the population. Like other medical specialties, family physicians are constantly learning new treatments, new procedures, and new diagnostic technology to provide the highest quality care to all family members. One of the key learning skills for family physicians is to learn to evaluate the scientific validity and usefulness of medical research to patient care.

### Shadowing a Family Physician

One way to learn more about the specialty is to “shadow” a physician. Many young people find that spending time with a family physician is a great way to learn about a potential career in family medicine. Shadowing physicians in various settings gives you a feel for the different types of work physicians do and the settings in which they practice. To find shadowing opportunities, contact hospitals, physicians’ offices, community health centers, outpatient surgery centers, nursing homes, and athletic training centers. Your local family physician may allow students to shadow at certain times during the week. Recognize that federal laws designed to protect patients’ privacy may limit the settings and situations you are permitted to observe. If you aren’t granted permission in one setting, try another. Some hospitals have an application process that is available on their website. Other opportunities may be provided by medical schools, Area Health Education Centers, and state medical associations. For more information on shadowing guidelines, refer to page 9.



The day prior to your visit, call to confirm the date and arrival time. Doctors frequently get called to emergencies and must alter their schedule at the last minute, stay flexible. Clarify with staff what you might expect to experience during your shadowing experience. Also, ask staff if you are required to participate in training prior to beginning your shadowing experience.

## THE PRE-MED YEARS

### Choosing a College

The choice of where to attend college is a major decision with many variables. Scholarship opportunities, family, educational opportunities, and location are just a few variables that students consider when deciding upon a college. There are many resources available to help you make this decision. Most guidance counselors will have information to help you make this decision. You can find additional information about college selection online.

### Choosing a Major Course of Study

When planning a program of study, you should keep in mind that usually you must meet three different sets of requirements. First are the requirements of the medical school, which must be completed before an applicant starts. Second are the general degree requirements, which are set by the faculty of the college for a particular degree. The departmental faculty sets the third list of requirements for the specific major. Planning should also include completion of the subject matter, which will be tested on the Medical College Admissions Text (MCAT) BEFORE taking the test.

### Requirements of Medical Schools

There are some variations among schools, but almost all U.S. medical schools will accept as minimum preparation in science one year each of general chemistry, general physics, general biology, and organic chemistry, all with the appropriate laboratory. Requirements for specific medical schools are found in Chapter 10 of the AAMC publication, Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR). This is an invaluable source of information and every pre-medical student should be very familiar with this book. Consult the latest edition of the MSAR before completing your medical school applications to ensure you have met all the requirements of each school. Students should visit individual medical school websites to review specific requirements.

Medical school admissions committees have no preference for one major (or degree) over another. They prefer that an applicant have a broad liberal arts background as opposed to a narrow technical background. Students usually do much better to work in a major in which they have a real interest and aptitude. It

is a mistake to major in a discipline that you do not like in the erroneous belief that it will improve the chances for acceptance.

The choice of a major should not be made hastily. In addition to considering the course requirements in a particular department and requirements for medical school, you must consider what you will do if your application to medical school is not successful. The academic major will largely determine the available options, without extensive additional training.

## Overall Academic Record

The undergraduate record, particularly grades in biology, chemistry, physics, and math, is the most important single factor in predicting whether or not a student will be admitted to a particular medical school. Most medical admissions committees feel that the quality of academic work leading to the Baccalaureate degree is the most important indicator of probable success in medical school. The academic record may be viewed as including the cumulative GPA, subjects taken, rigor of the major and trends in performance (i.e., were grades mediocre in the freshman year with a constant improvement during the sophomore and junior years, vice versa, or was performance relatively constant?). Admissions committees on this factor consider a strong undergraduate academic record evidence of ability and motivation, hence, the heavy reliance. Grades are not evaluated alone but in the context of the total academic program with such factors as part-time employment, participation in varsity sports, and other severe demands on study time looked upon as extenuating circumstances.

Pre-medical students are cautioned not to make a practice of withdrawing from courses. Withdrawals on a transcript are a cause for concern by most admissions committees. One or two withdrawals will not adversely affect your chances for admission, but several, even with a good GPA, might be viewed very apprehensively. Most medical schools respect students that demonstrate they can handle a heavy load (17-18 hours per semester) rather than completing the minimum full-time undergraduate requirement (12 hours). Remember that the medical school workload is very heavy, and admissions committees are looking for students who will be able to keep up with their coursework.

## Research

Experience in scientific research is recommended by some admissions committees for the academically strong student with interest, especially if the results are published and/or used to write an honors thesis. This type of experience is essential if you aspire to a career in academic medicine or research, but can also be useful for any pre-medical student. Many undergraduates develop an interest in pursuing research as a career while participating in projects in the laboratory of a faculty member. Some of these students will enter a joint MD/PhD degree program where their educational costs are

completely covered by the sponsoring medical school. These students may also receive a living allowance that will allow them to complete the program with no debts. These types of programs are explained in more detail in the MSAR.

## Factors in Medical School Selection

Medical schools utilize an admissions committee appointed by the dean of medicine for selecting the entering class. The committee size will vary from school to school, but it will normally be composed of teaching physicians from the clinical faculty, research doctorates from the basic sciences faculty, and medical students who are typically in their third or fourth year. Some schools also appoint alumni (practicing physicians), and most have some representation from the general public (consumer representatives). Year-to-year changes in the composition of the committee at any particular school are often reflected in slightly different emphasis on selection factors. However, all medical schools will select students to fill their entering class who show evidence of high intellectual ability, a good record of accomplishments and personal traits that indicate ability to communicate with and relate to patients in a realistic yet compassionate manner.

Admissions committees strive for objectivity in making their decisions regarding admission. There is, therefore, a great deal of emphasis on grades, scores on the MCAT, and other factors that can be easily measured. They also consider any information that is available regarding an applicant's overall suitability and promise as a physician. Factors include:

- Overall academic record
- MCAT scores
- Evaluations from faculty members who have had the applicant in class
- Quality personal statement
- Impressions made during a personal interview with faculty and students of the medical school including members of the admissions committee
- Work or volunteer experience in a clinical setting, extracurricular activities, and leadership positions
- State of residence
- Stated specialty choice

## The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is a standardized, multiple-choice examination designed to assess problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills in addition to the examinee's knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine. Scores are reported in each of the following areas: Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences, and a Writing Sample. The writing test consists of two 30-minute essays, neither of which

will be scientific in orientation. Medical college admission committees consider MCAT scores as part of their admission decision process.

## MCAT Key Facts:

- All U.S. medical schools require the test.
- The MCAT is a computerized test that takes approximately five hours to complete.
- You can take the MCAT a maximum of three times per year.
- You can register and schedule your MCAT exam online at <https://services.aamc.org/20/mcat/>.
- Registration fee is approximately \$225.
- The AAMC does offer a Fee Assistance Program (FAP) to individuals with extreme financial limitations. The FAP will reduce the MCAT test fee to \$85 for those who qualify. Find out if you are eligible at <http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap>.
- Medical school admissions officers usually suggest that you take the test in the calendar year prior to the year in which you plan to enter medical school.

There are many review courses offered to students taking the MCAT. A commercial review course may have value in that the problems and material are designed to teach a student “how to take the test” and the practice tests used may give students with poor test-taking skills good experience. The primary disadvantage of commercial review courses is that they are very expensive, usually costing close to \$1,000 for a course. They may be worth the price for certain students, but it should be pointed out that some commercial reviews utilize instructors

who do not know their subject matter as well as they should and “crash courses” which may be completed in only a few days have not been shown to increase scores in most cases. Students taking a full course load often do not have time to utilize the material available in a commercial review course. Only the individual student can answer whether or not a commercial review course is worth its cost.



## Extracurricular Activities and Work Experience

There is a common myth that pre-medical students sit with their noses in a book 18 hours a day and don't participate in activities other than studying. This is, of course, not true. Pre-medical students participate in as many extracurricular activities as students in most other programs and a number hold part-time jobs to help meet expenses. Many successful pre-medical students join service clubs and religious organizations, play varsity or intramural sports, participate in debating societies, theatrical groups, glee clubs, the band, and do all the other things done by a typical student. Successful pre-medical students, however, know how to order their priorities. They do the work first, and then play later.

Admissions committees view involvement in extracurricular activities very favorably. If you can maintain a competitive grade point average in a rigorous curriculum and still have the time and energy to actively participate in extracurricular activities, both your aptitude and motivation must be rather high. There is no particular benefit to the student who is a “joiner” and who pays dues but never participates or becomes involved in an organization. It must be emphasized, however, that no amount of involvement in extracurricular activities can substitute for a good academic record and strong MCAT scores.

Most admissions committees will also view work experience in a hospital, neighborhood health center, or some other medical facility quite favorably. This is not a prerequisite for admission, but is becoming increasingly important for serious consideration by an admissions committee. The primary value of working in a hospital, doctor's office, public health clinic, or nursing home is to help you decide whether to pursue a career in medicine.

Some students take training (such as the Emergency Medical Technician course), which allows them to obtain employment in an emergency room, with an ambulance service or in some other area as a regular or part-time paramedical employee. The experience gained may be of considerable value if the work schedule does not cause grades to drop. As a general rule, you are urged not to seek part-time employment during your first year but wait until a strong academic record has been established if you must work. If grades begin to drop, the job may have to go. It is often better to work summers or holidays so as not to interfere with classes and suffer a drop in GPA that may jeopardize acceptance.

Obviously, not every pre-medical student will be able to find a job that will offer a worthwhile experience in medicine and provide financially as well. Volunteer work is usually available in the area hospitals in many different departments. Jobs that require considerable contact with the public offer excellent opportunities to develop better human relations skills. Some jobs teach personal management skills and might help you

assume increasing levels of responsibility. Any “people oriented” work experience may be valuable and will often be discussed in an interview.

## Shadowing Health Professionals

Shadowing health professionals is not only a good experience, but it also looks good on an application. Students who have shadowed health professionals show that they have taken the initiative to investigate their career choice and have spent time and effort learning about the career. It is very important to keep track of physicians you have shadowed and the number of hours you spent in their offices.

It is a good idea to shadow many different professionals and not just physicians. Also important is to find one or two professionals that you can shadow on a regular basis so that they may become familiar with you and your career goals. They may also feel comfortable writing you a letter of recommendation if they have mentored you or allowed you to follow them on an ongoing basis. It would also be a good idea to journal your experiences while shadowing. Completing this information may help when writing your personal statement.

## Shadowing Guidelines

Whether in a hospital, clinic, or physician’s practice, your dress and appearance should be professional but comfortable. Use the following guidelines:

- Wear flat comfortable shoes, but avoid sandals and open-toe or athletic shoes.
- Men should wear nice dress pants and a pressed shirt. Shirts should be tucked in. Ties are optional.
- Women should wear below the knee dresses or dressy pants and a conservative top. Avoid clothing that is revealing or exposes undergarments.
- Avoid excessive jewelry or fragrances.

## Effective Shadowing

Physicians are very busy! There may not be time to talk during patient visits, but arrive on time and be prepared for occasional downtime.

- Come prepared with two or three questions to ask the preceptor (physician you shadow).
- Do exactly what your preceptor or the staff asks you to do.
- Avoid asking the patient questions or asking the doctor questions in front of the patient.
- Respect patient confidentiality and privacy. Do not talk about the patient or their information at any time. Not only is it unethical, but it is also illegal.
- Allow the physician to introduce you to the patient but don’t be concerned if they do not.
- Avoid taking notes during patient visits. General notes about your experience can be made after the clinical session.

- It is appropriate to volunteer with appropriate tasks if the physician or staff asks you.
- If at any time during a procedure you feel light-headed or dizzy, alert the physician and leave the patient’s room to sit down. Some students find it helpful to have a light snack prior to starting the clinical session.
- Have a good time!

## Volunteering

Volunteering not only helps students decide whether medicine is the right field for them, it can be a way to meet others while providing service to the community. Medical school admissions guides strongly urge their applicants to engage in some kind of volunteer activity before applying to medical school. Volunteering is viewed as increasingly important to admission decisions. It is best to begin volunteering in high school. Medical school admission committees don’t view volunteering as a class you take one summer or semester. It’s something that will reflect commitment and integrity. You can’t show that in only a few months.

## Research

Experience in scientific research is recommended by admissions committees for the academically strong student with interest. This type of experience is essential if you aspire to a career in academic medicine or research. Many undergraduates develop an interest in pursuing research as a career while participating in projects in the laboratory of a faculty member.

## Evaluation Letters

An important part of the documentation to support an application for admission to medical school is the faculty evaluation, often referred to as a recommendation. Evaluations are sent only to the medical schools that send the applicant a secondary or supplemental application.

Evaluations may be requested from faculty members at any time. Make an effort to meet your professors and teaching assistants. Most will be glad to talk to you during office hours. Since the introductory science courses tend to be large, students may find it difficult to get to know professors personally. You may ask laboratory and teaching assistants for evaluations, but it is a good idea to have the course professor co-sign the letter. Teaching assistants may not be as familiar with writing letters of evaluation, whereas experienced professors can very often put a student’s motivation and aptitude into excellent perspective with a few well-chosen words. The most important factor in selecting an instructor to prepare an evaluation is that he or she knows you well enough to be able to comment from personal knowledge on some fairly subjective factors such as motivation, interpersonal and communication skills, compassion, and general character. A good evaluation will not be a rehash of grades made in courses, but will supplement other available





information and establish its own credibility based on what is said in the narrative. You should approach professors near the end of the semester, ask if they can write you a strong evaluation, and supply them with a copy of your transcript and a brief resume.

## APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

Deciding on what type of medical school and what type of program is the best fit for your medical career is often challenging. Be sure to explore all of your options.

### Types of Programs

The Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) has a complete listing of medical programs in the country along with individual program requirements. This resource should be studied carefully for selection factors and guidelines for admissions.

### Allopathic Medicine

Allopathic schools, the most widely available type of medical training, confer the MD degree on their graduates. The traditional model of training consists of two years of basic science courses followed by two years of clinical rotations. Allopathic schools focus on the “systems-based” approach to medicine. The program is organized around physiologic systems, such as the endocrine system or the nervous system. Many schools employ case studies and teach through clinical vignettes. Allopathic training will give you the option to practice in any of the medical specialties and is universally recognized as the medical degree, including international practice. Students can find out more about allopathic medicine through the American Medical Association (AMA) at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/no-index/education-careers/2320.shtml>.

### Osteopathic Medicine

Osteopathic physicians, who receive the DO degree, consider the whole person, including physical, emotional and spiritual components, instead of just treating specific symptoms or illnesses. They regard the body as an integrated whole and focus on preventive health care. They also use a hands-on system of diagnosis and treatment known as osteopathic manipulative medicine. The course work for osteopathic medicine includes two years of basic science courses followed by two years of clinical training. DOs can specialize in any medical field and practice the full scope of modern medicine. Students can learn more about osteopathic medicine through the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) at [http://www.osteopathic.org/index.cfm?PageID=ost\\_main](http://www.osteopathic.org/index.cfm?PageID=ost_main). The best way to decide which path is right for you is to spend time with both MDs and DOs and talk to them about their practices.

#### MDs and DOs are alike in many ways. Both:

- Earn a four-year undergraduate degree with emphasis in science courses.
- Complete four years of basic medical education.
- Must pass state licensing examinations.
- Practice in fully accredited and licensed hospitals and medical centers.

### Early Decision Programs

Some medical schools make provisions for students to submit their applications and be admitted in advance of the standard deadlines. This is referred to as an Early Decision Program (EDP). The application deadline is usually in the month of August and a decision is made by October 1. You may only apply to one school offering an EDP and, if admitted, you are obligated to attend that school. Therefore, you should only apply to your first choice. If you are not admitted under this program, you will be notified in sufficient time to make the deadline for regular application to other medical schools. It is sometimes possible for a rejected EDP applicant to be admitted to the same school during the regular admissions process. Check with the admissions department in the medical school for specific requirements of their EDP.

Schools with an EDP select a small percentage of the class, usually less than 25 percent. To be reasonably sure of selection, you should have credentials at least as good as the average for the previous year’s entering class. The EDP applicant must take the MCAT no later than the spring before applying in summer. Letters of evaluation must be on file early and the Committee Interview, if desired, must be completed by the end of May. If you are rejected under the EDP, you will be notified in sufficient time so that the deadline for application to other medical schools may be met. It is sometimes possible for a rejected EDP student to be admitted during the regular admission cycle.

## Joint Degree Programs

Some medical schools offer students the opportunity to earn the MD or DO degree plus another professional degree. Visit the individual medical school websites to see what joint degree programs they offer. If you are interested in BA/MD, MD/PhD, MD/MPH, DO/MBA, MD/JD, or other specific programs offered by various schools, contact that school for application materials.

## Where to Apply

For most medical schools, the chances for admission are determined in large part by the applicant's state of legal residence. This is true of both private and public schools. In all cases, state supported public medical schools give preferential consideration to residents of their state. There is usually an upper limit imposed by legislation or administrative edict on the number of non-resident students accepted in a class in a state school. In many private medical schools, preferential consideration is given to residents of the state for at least a portion of the class.

A number of private medical schools recruit from the national pool of applicants. This includes schools such as Duke, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Vanderbilt, Washington University (St. Louis), and Yale. The credentials of students accepted at these prestige schools are outstanding. All things considered, the chances for acceptance are lower for a typical applicant at a school that recruits primarily from the national pool than at a medical school, which gives preferential consideration to students from its home state. This certainly does not mean that all the best students go to these private schools. Many factors determine where a student will matriculate including medical school tuition, family responsibilities, programs offered, and individual preference.

The Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) has a complete listing of medical programs in the country along with individual program requirements and demographic information. The MSAR should be carefully studied, especially the section on selection factors and the breakdown on state of legal residence of the latest class. If you meet their requirements and appear to have a reasonable chance of acceptance, you should further investigate the school by reading the latest catalog or bulletin available online.

State supported medical schools usually admit a few nonresidents, but these will typically be people who have some strong ties to the state and/or the school. The credentials of non-residents are usually above the class average. A typical state-supported medical school may invite non-resident applicants for an interview only if they have a cumulative GPA of 3.6 or and scores of 10 or more on all areas of the MCAT. A new trend that appears to be gaining in popularity for public schools is to require that non-residents apply through the Early Decision Program (see page 7). If accepted, these applicants must

matriculate. Such a policy ensures that the only non-residents who apply have the medical school as their first choice.

## Selection Process

A medical school admissions committee is likely to be made up of teaching physicians from the clinical faculty, research faculty from the biological sciences, and medical students. Alumnae or community physicians may also serve on admissions committees.

A committee takes the following factors into consideration:

- Overall academic record
- MCAT scores
- Evaluations from faculty members who had the applicant in class
- Quality of the personal statement
- Impressions made during the personal interviews
- Volunteer experience, leadership positions, and extracurricular activities
- Exposure to medicine and reason for pursuing a career in medicine
- State of residence
- Stated specialty choice
- Physician specialty needs in the state

## Primary Application

Application process begins in June of the year prior to anticipated enrollment.

- Take MCAT exam in Spring of Junior year.
- Log on to [www.amcas.org](http://www.amcas.org) or [www.aacomas.org](http://www.aacomas.org) and complete online or paper application.
- Submit MCAT scores, official transcripts, and AMCAS or AACOMAS application fee.
- Contact AMCAS or AACOMAS to verify that all of the above have been received.
- Deadline for submission: February 1 prior to the Fall of anticipated enrollment.

## Secondary Application

If an applicant is not rejected in the preliminary screening, medical schools require a secondary application, which will be mailed upon receipt of the AMCAS or AACOMAS application. Most schools require an additional application fee, which must be mailed to the school with the completed secondary application. There is usually a deadline date for filing the secondary application. This date should be carefully observed. Check with individual schools for specific requirements and deadlines.

Most secondary applications include:

- Biographical information
- Dual degree program (optional)
- Test scores
- Clinical health experience
- Essay questions
- Statement of disciplinary actions
- Statement of nondiscrimination
- Letters of evaluation

## Personal Statement

The personal statement is the last part of the application process, but preparation for this essay should begin as early as possible. This is one part of the admissions process in which applicants have a direct influence and should submit the best product possible. While admissions committees often emphasize that they do not advise students about what to write, there are specific themes and topics that can be included. To stand out you want your personal statement to reflect your goals and the qualities unique to you. As you start your essay, take the time to carefully reflect on the academic foundation you have built and the experiences that have contributed to the development of your character and led to your decision to pursue a career in medicine.

Possible themes to include in a personal statement:

- Reasons or motivation behind choosing medicine as a career
- An experience that influenced your career choice
- Qualifications and accomplishments that make you stand out
- Personal values that reflect commitment to a service-oriented career



Ten tips for writing a personal statement essay:

- Develop a theme for your essay and write about a topic that you know about and that also excites you.
- Use concrete examples and personal details.
- Be concise. Every word counts and “fluff” is easily detected.
- Address any weaknesses in your application, but don’t dwell on them.
- Pay attention to good writing skills, including use of the active voice, sentence structure, vocabulary, and transitions. Avoid the use of clichés.
- Focus on capturing the reader’s attention.
- Revise your essay multiple times.
- Have multiple people review your essay, including professors, friends and family for an outside viewpoint.
- Do not use the essay as an autobiography. Avoid listing information.
- Be authentic.

## Interviews

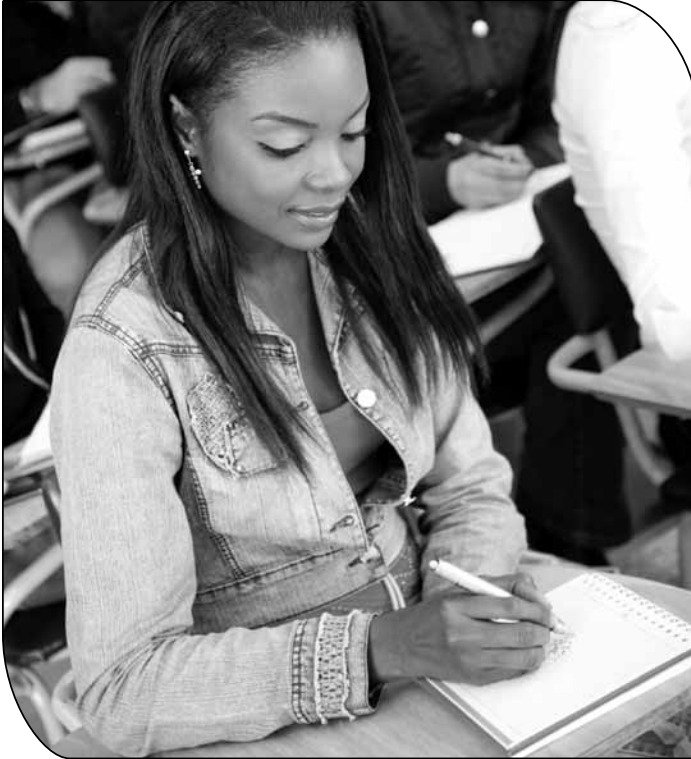
Most medical schools require a personal interview, though the specific processes differ among schools. Interviews may take place on or off campus. Interviews may be conducted by an admissions committee member, by multiple members of the admissions committee, or by off-campus interviewers, such as practicing physicians and/or current students. Generally, the interview assessments are added to the admissions file.

During the interview be prepared to answer questions about:

- Critical thinking skills and problem solving
- Ethical questions and scenarios
- Grades and test scores
- Personal attributes and experiences including philosophical viewpoints
- Career choice – “Why do you want to go into medicine?”
- Attributes that make you a great fit with the medical school

## Final thoughts

Navigating the path through college and medical school to become a physician is not always easy, but you will find lots of resources and assistance to help you along the way—if you know where to look. Issues of medical student debt, educational requirements, and the competitiveness of medical school application can all be conquered with adequate preparation and planning. The final section of this guidebook will provide you with additional tools and a resource list. Good luck as you continue your education. Your future patients will be meeting you soon!



## RESOURCE LIST FOR MEDICAL CAREER INFORMATION

### Virtual FMIG

<http://fmignet.aafp.org>

### Aspiring Docs (Association of American Medical Colleges)

[www.Aspiringdocs.org](http://www.Aspiringdocs.org)

### Ventures Scholars Program

[www.venturescholar.org](http://www.venturescholar.org)

### National Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Organization

[www.nationalahec.org](http://www.nationalahec.org)

## OTHER STUDENT MEDICAL ASSOCIATION WEBSITES

### American Medical Student Association

[www.amsa.org](http://www.amsa.org)

### American Medical Women's Association

[www.amwa-doc.org](http://www.amwa-doc.org)

### Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum

[www.apiahf.org](http://www.apiahf.org)

### Association of American Indian Physicians

[www.aaip.org](http://www.aaip.org)

### National Hispanic Medical Association

[www.nhmamd.org](http://www.nhmamd.org)

### Student National Medical Association

[www.snma.org](http://www.snma.org)

### Student Osteopathic Medical Association

[www.studentdo.com](http://www.studentdo.com)



## MY CAREER INVENTORY

List your personal strengths.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

What do you need to improve?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

What is your current long term career goal? Is it the same as last year?

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What career choices are you considering? What are you doing to investigate that career? What clubs, organizations, and certifications can you use now to learn more about that career?

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What colleges are you interested in?

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Where are they located?

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**MY ACADEMIC RECORD / Freshman Year**

High School Information

Year: 20\_\_\_\_-20\_\_\_\_

School name \_\_\_\_\_

School address \_\_\_\_\_

School phone \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated graduation date (mm/yy) \_\_\_\_\_

School Counselor name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Freshman checklist:**

- Participate in school orientation to learn about the different activities available at your high school. Join clubs, play sports and volunteer.
- Take elective courses that interest you such as music, art, theater, or a foreign language.
- Take challenging courses to expand your knowledge.
- Aim for As and Bs in all of your classes. Focus on your class work and your homework to develop the study skills you will need to succeed in college.
- Get information about what courses you need to take to graduate high school and be eligible for college.
- Attend college fairs and career fairs and meet with counselors and teachers to start thinking about what careers might interest you.

Fall Classes	Teacher	Dual Credit	Grade	A/P
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Spring Classes	Teacher	Dual Credit	Grade	A/P
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**MY ACADEMIC RECORD / *Sophomore Year***

High School Information (if different from previous year)

Year: 20\_\_\_\_-20\_\_\_\_

School name \_\_\_\_\_

School address \_\_\_\_\_

School phone \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated graduation date (mm/yy) \_\_\_\_\_

School Counselor name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Sophomore checklist:**

- Take Geometry or Algebra II and college prep English if available.
- Continue to earn As and Bs in all your classes.
- Take part in enrichment programs and special summer workshops and camps in music, science, writing, math or other subjects.
- Start considering colleges or professional schools you might be interested in attending. Begin to inform yourself about colleges, financial aid, scholarships and the educational requirements of the different careers you might be interested in.
- Check in with counselors to learn about the PSAT exam (Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test), which is required for some national scholarships, such as the National Merit Scholarship, National Achievement Scholarship, etc.
- Start thinking about when to take the college entrance exams, the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) or the ACT (American College Testing). Register for the exam one month before the test date. If you take the exam in the spring or summer, you will get the results in time to see if you need to retake the test in the fall.

Fall Classes	Teacher	Dual Credit	Grade	A/P
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Spring Classes	Teacher	Dual Credit	Grade	A/P
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**MY ACADEMIC RECORD / Junior Year**

High School Information (if different from previous year)

Year: 20\_\_\_\_-20\_\_\_\_

School name \_\_\_\_\_

School address \_\_\_\_\_

School phone \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated graduation date (mm/yy) \_\_\_\_\_

School Counselor name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Junior Checklist:**

- Check with your high school counselor to see what college prep classes are available through your school.
- Continue to earn As and Bs, which are especially important during your junior and senior years.
- Prepare for the SAT and ACT by reviewing test preparation books with sample questions. Attend workshops on how to prepare for these exams.
- Attend college information programs and meet with campus representatives when they visit your high school.

Fall Classes	Teacher	Dual Credit	Grade	A/P
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Spring Classes	Teacher	Dual Credit	Grade	A/P
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____



**MY ACADEMIC RECORD / Senior Year**

High School Information (if different from previous year)

Year: 20\_\_\_\_-20\_\_\_\_

School name \_\_\_\_\_

School address \_\_\_\_\_

School phone \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated graduation date (mm/yy) \_\_\_\_\_

School Counselor name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

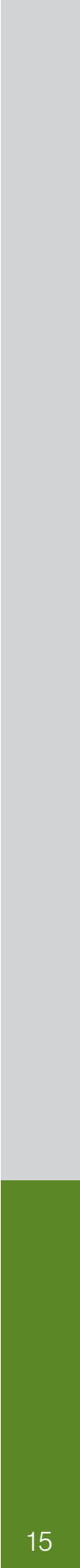
**Senior checklist:**

- Take any advanced courses in math, science or English that you can.
- Review class schedules with your counselor to ensure that you are meeting all of your college preparatory requirements.
- Maintain As and Bs in your classes.
- Early September: Register for SAT or ACT.
- Begin touring college campuses and meet with admission representatives.
- In the fall, check with high school counselors or career centers for scholarships awarded by your high school, college of choice, local companies or community groups.
- By January, complete and file the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).

Fall Classes	Teacher	Dual Credit	Grade	A/P
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Spring Classes

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____



## My Personal Academic Record

Identify sources of academic support (tutors, study groups, supplemental courses, etc.)

_____	Contact_____
_____	Contact_____
_____	Contact_____

Identify sources of community support (hospitals, neighbors, organizations, etc.)

_____	Contact_____
_____	Contact_____
_____	Contact_____

## Honors, Awards and noteworthy accomplishments

Award you received

Organization that gave the award  
(school, community, area hosp.)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## List clubs, sports, music, organizations

Club/organization

Officer position held Club Sponsor/advisor  
(if applicable)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## My Personal Academic Record

### Grade Point Average

Fall semester      Spring semester      Overall GPA to date

Freshman Year \_\_\_\_\_

Sophomore Year \_\_\_\_\_

Junior Year \_\_\_\_\_

Senior Year \_\_\_\_\_

### ACT Score

English                  Math                  Reading                  Science                  Composite

Date Taken \_\_\_\_\_

Date Taken \_\_\_\_\_

Date Taken \_\_\_\_\_

### Volunteering Log

#### Date(s) Clinic/Hospital

Where did you volunteer?                  Volunteer contact name & phone                  Hours volunteered

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### Community Service Log

Date                  Activity                  Location                  Hours

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