



Adapted from ExploreHealthCareers.org

Physician (M.D.)

Overview

Physicians examine patients, obtain medical histories, and order, perform and interpret diagnostic tests. They counsel patients about illness, injuries, health conditions, and preventive healthcare (diet/fitness, smoking cessation, etc.). Physicians work in one or more specialties, including, among others:

- anesthesiology
- family and general medicine
- general internal medicine
- general pediatrics
- obstetrics and gynecology
- psychiatry
- surgery

For more information about medical specialties, visit the **Careers in Medicine** page on the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Website. For a fascinating glimpse into the real-life experiences of seven doctors, see NOVA Online's special feature, "**Survivor M.D.**"

NOTE: For a user-friendly, interactive resource on pursuing a career in allopathic medicine, see the Association of American Medical Colleges' **AspiringDocs** website.

Working Conditions

The **Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)** recognizes 112 specific specialties and subspecialties, and the American Board of Medical Specialties represents 24 board-certified specialties (with many sub-specialties within each of these **major specialties**). The duties, training, salaries, and workforce information are significantly different among these specialty fields.

Many medical schools are increasing enrollments in anticipation of an expected shortage of doctors in all professional and geographic areas. Physicians in the future may be likely to work fewer hours, retire earlier, and have lower earnings. Employment opportunities should be especially good in rural and low-income areas.

There is a strong network in place to help physicians find the right job in the right environment. Among other sources is the interactive **job networking website** operated by the American Medical Association's highly respected professional journal, JAMA.

Academic Requirements

The minimum educational requirement for entry into a medical school is 3 years of college, although most applicants have at least a bachelor's degree and many have advanced degrees. To be sure you're taking the right courses while in college, see the Preparation Timeline for medicine on this page. The AAMC also has very useful advice about **getting into medical school**. Also, some universities (e.g., **Yale** and **Penn State**) offer general advice about how to prepare for med school.

NOTE: If you already have a degree but did not study science in college, don't give up! There are numerous **post-baccalaureate programs** that will help you catch up and give you the courses you'll need in order to apply to med school.

To apply to medical school, you will have to submit a copy of your college and/or grad school transcript(s), letters of recommendation, and your scores from the **Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)**. NOTE: If you don't do as well on the MCAT as you'd like, you can always retake the exam. This website has helpful study tips.

Once in med school, you can expect to spend the next four years studying basic science and doing clinical "rotations" -- hands-on learning in real health care settings. Traditionally, the first two years of med school are spent in the classroom before students are allowed to do rotations. However, an increasing number of medical schools are giving students clinical experience early on and throughout the four-year program.

In terms of the curriculum itself, some med schools take a "systems-based" approach, focusing on one physiological system at a time (the respiratory system, reproductive system, etc.), while others are "case-based" -- teaching about the human body and disease by having students follow individual patient cases from start to finish. A number of med schools employ a combination of approaches.

After four years of med school, you are awarded an MD or medical degree. NOTE: More and more schools are offering combined degree programs (e.g., MD/MPH, MD/PHD or MD/JD). If you are interested in this option, see the AAMC's searchable database of **combined degree programs**

After earning your MD, it's time to choose a specialty and do your residency. Residency programs, which are offered in conjunction with intensive clinical training programs, may last anywhere from 3 years to 8 years, depending upon the specialty you choose.

For more information on residency programs, check out the American Medical Association (AMA)'s online FREIDA service -- an interactive database with **over 7,800 graduate medical education programs** accredited by the **Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education**, plus more than 200 combined specialty programs.

For more information on going to medical school, consider buying a copy of **Medical School Admissions Requirements**, which is said to be "the Bible of med school guides." Also see:

Careers in Medicine

TomorrowsDoctors.org

American Medical Student Association

Student National Medical Association

Student Doctor Network

Note: The cost of earning a degree in medicine is high, but different avenues are available for funding your education. For more information, see the Find Funding section of this Website, and/or check out the Association of American Medical Colleges' article on "**Financing Your Medical Education.**" This is one of many informative resources available through the **AAMC Website**.

Preparation Timeline

The following timeline gives the basics for a traditional medical student. Remember, different medical schools may have different deadlines; the following is intended to serve as a general guide only.

Freshman Year

Take the following courses:

- General Biology I + lab
- General Biology II + lab
- General Chemistry I + lab
- General Chemistry II + lab
- Calculus I, if required
- Calculus II
- Electives that interest you

Explore prehealth advisory program in your school; get involved outside of academics; join clubs and organizations. Find a doctor to shadow for a day to get a real feel for what it's like.

Sophomore Year

Take the following courses:

- Organic Chemistry I + lab
- Organic Chemistry II + lab
- English
- Other classes for your major and electives

Start researching medical schools; get to know your professors; and participate in medically related clinical or research activities.

Junior Year

Take the following courses:

- Physics I + lab
- Physics II + lab
- More classes for your major and electives

February

- Request AMCAS or AACOMAS application
- Register for the MCAT
- Begin studying for MCAT (if you haven't done so already!)
- Continue med school research

March

- Be sure you've registered for MCAT in time
- Start requesting letters of recommendation (start with those professors who know you best)

April

- Take the MCAT
- Start working on your applications, with special attention to ghd personal statement.

May

- If you wish to apply for a fee waiver through the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) or the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (ACOMAS), applications are accepted beginning May 15.

June

- Send in those applications. Remember: most schools use rolling admissions, so it pays to SUBMIT EARLY!
- NOTE: If your MCAT scores are low, don't give up! Here are some tips for how to tackle it again -- and do better the second time around.

Senior Year

July through December

- Complete and return your secondary applications as you receive them
- Start preparing for your interviews
- Investigate financial aid options

September through February

- This is when most interviews take place. Be prepared!

March through May 15

- Start looking more in depth into scholarships, loans and other ways to pay for medical school
- May 15: The date by which you must choose your med school if you have been accepted by more than one.
- If you've been accepted and chosen your school, celebrate! And start preparing now to become a successful med school student.

Professional Associations

- Association of American Medical Colleges
- American Medical Association

Source

www.aamc.org