

GETTING READY FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEWS



You've prepared for and taken the MCAT, requested references, written personal statements, and completed numerous applications to medical school. The final steps in your applications are the medical school interviews. This booklet is designed help you prepare for this phase of applying.

INTERVIEW TIPS

- Begin your preparation for interviews by doing some serious thinking about what strengths you would like to emphasize in the course of an interview. Make a list of your "selling points", including work experience, volunteer and extracurricular activities, educational background, and your skills.
 - Show how your personal qualities and intellectual strengths complement each other. Be prepared to defend the choices you have made.
 - Do your homework about the institution where you are being interviewed. Ask questions which show that you have researched the school and have moved a step beyond the facts to a level of creative inquiry. Avoid questions that are answered in printed materials.
 - Check your answers for determination, commitment, and a sense of yourself as a winner. Demonstrate that you can survive and thrive through the rigors of medical school and a medical career.
 - Never be led into a situation where you criticize the college, another institution, or a person. The assumption is that if you are unhappy in one place, you might be unhappy in another. If asked about situations that were less than ideal, emphasize the learning or growth you gained from the challenging experience.
 - Early in the interview try to ask a question such as, "are there particular qualities which your medical school is looking for in its students?" This may help you identify stylistic quirks or biases that you would do well not to confront.
 - Be aware of those aspects of your application which might not be entirely favorable - an uneven record, borderline GPA, MCAT's, science gaps, etc. Be prepared to speak about what makes these deficits unimportant in your case. Don't make the mistake of over-emphasizing your weaknesses. Appreciate your strengths despite whatever limitations you may perceive in your presenting credentials. If you fear an interviewer will ask you embarrassing questions about your achievements, practice those questions most of all.
 - Interviews tend to last from 20 minutes to an hour and a half. There are usually a few interviews, a tour and a meeting with current students. Interviewers may have reviewed your application prior to the interview (an open interview) or not (a closed interview).
 - Interviewing is a skill that can be learned and improved through practice. You may want to get together with a friend and practice what you will say. The Career Development Office is a good place to prepare as well. You can schedule a mock interview with one of our counselors. Since applicants often have only a few days warning of an upcoming medical school interview, prepare and practice early so as not to be caught off guard.
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QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED

In general questions which seem to show up regularly address your decision to become a physician, family history, academic background, research, activities, abilities, grades, low score on MCAT's, essays, personal beliefs and opinions, etc.

Past Smith students have stressed the importance of staying current with the issues physicians are facing today, particularly the changing nature of health care. You should be aware of the economics of health care, including HMO's, PPO's, and other health care delivery systems. Ethical issues are often explored as well, such as euthanasia, choice of transplant recipients, living wills, surrogate parenting, gene therapy, etc. The questions below are ones which have been asked of past Smith medical school applicants.

As you look these questions over, you will see they cover a range of areas. Some are quite surprising. Interviews not only vary from school to school but also among interviewers within the same institution. While it rarely happens, occasionally some interviewers attempt to test applicants' composure with pressured and/or confrontational styles. The challenge with a "stress interview" is to maintain your composure. Most interviewers, however, honestly want to have a mature conversation with you. Sometimes interviews can be so friendly and conversational in style that it is difficult to get your strong points across. It is important to have an idea of what you want to convey prior to the meeting.

- Why do you want to be a doctor?
 - What will you contribute to the profession?
 - What actual experiences in medicine have you had – how have they affected you? Do you know what a real doctor's life is like?
 - What are your best qualities?
 - What major influences in your life led to your decision to pursue medicine?
 - Tell me about your research experience.
 - Why did you choose Smith?
 - What will you do if you don't get into medical school this year?
 - Do you have a plan for paying for medical school?
 - Of all people, dead or alive, who would you most like to have dinner with and why? (this is a variation on the question about who you most admire, which is frequently asked)
 - What problems do you see in health care? What is the biggest or most important problem in health care today and in the future? If you were president of the U.S., how would you solve the problem of the high cost of health care?
 - What is the one thing that would prevent you from going to medical school or practicing medicine?
 - Why did you choose this particular school (give specifics)? Do you know of anyone who has attended this medical school?
 - What were your favorite, least favorite courses?
 - What was the last book you read?
 - How would you judge the interview situation between you and me?
 - Explain the flaws in your academic record or MCATs.
 - Explain your interest in medicine, starting at the beginning. Be specific.
 - Tell me about something you handled well and something you didn't.
 - I see you have no experience in a medical setting, therefore, how do you know you want to get your hands dirty and really become part of the medical world?
 - Do you read any scientific journals?
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- Is there anything you want us to know about you that we haven't asked you already and is not mentioned on your application form?
- What specialties interest you?
- What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?
- A story is read in which an MD has to make a decision involving ethics and morals. "What would you do in the same situation?"
- How does the U.S. rank in birth mortality? Why is it ranked worst among industrial nations?
- What do you need to work on to make you a good doctor?
- What activities are you involved in, in and out of school? What do you do in your spare time?
- Have you been accepted to other schools yet? Where have you been rejected?
- Describe yourself in 3 words.
- Are you able to function independently and without supervision?
- What are your feelings on euthanasia?
- How many interviews have you had?
- What are your goals in medicine?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What do you think about national health insurance?
- Why do you think you're an exceptional candidate?
- Tell me about a problem you encountered and how you overcame it.
- How do you handle tension/stress?
- Tell me about your family.
- What makes you think you can succeed in medical school?
- How would you handle being around sick people all the time?
- What did you like least in college and why? What were your favorite and least favorite courses?
- As a woman, how will you mesh your career with a possible family?
- Why did you take time off?
- Describe a difficult event or situation in your life and how you handled it – tell how your reaction typified your style of doing things.
- What do you think is the major difference between medical schools ?
- What health system should government implement?
- What personal traits brought about an interest in medicine?
- What would you do if the head of a department screamed at you?
- Compare a teaching hospital to a private hospital.
- Do you think your grades are a good indicator of your abilities?
- If you were choosing a major again, would you choose the same one?
- What are you most proud of about yourself?
- What makes you laugh? Why?
- After graduating from medical school you learn that as a doctor you may only earn \$50,000 a year. Do you still want to become a doctor?
- What are DRG's (diagnostic related groupings)?

WEBSITE FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEWS— interviewfeedback.com.

Students talk about their specific interviews by school— a must-read before any interview.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK

Be prepared with questions about the medical school at which you are interviewing. The questions and text on the next page, from The Organization of Student Representatives of the Association of American Medical Colleges in 1992, can be used as a springboard for formulating your own questions.

31 Questions I Wish I Had Asked

Medical schools, like individuals, are very different—in their philosophies, faculties, curricula, and the type of students they attract. Consequently, selecting the "best" medical school for you can be very challenging. The following set of questions was compiled by medical students from across the country to assist you in evaluating the schools you will visit. This list is by no means complete; it was designed to serve as a base for your own questions. Keep in mind that the interview represents a wonderful time or you to learn, so don't be shy about asking anyone your questions. Congratulations on your career choice and good luck with interviews!

Curriculum

1. Are there any special programs for which this medical school is noted?
2. Describe this school's curriculum in the pre-clinical and clinical years. Are there any innovations, like Problem-Based Learning?
3. Are there opportunities for students to design, conduct, and publish their own research?
4. Is there a note-taking service? If so, is it University-run or student-run?
5. Is there flexibility in the coursework (the number of electives) and the timing of the courses (accelerating, decelerating, and time off) during the pre-clinical and clinical years?
6. Has this medical school, or any of its clinical departments, been on probation or habits accreditation revoked?
7. How do students from this medical school perform on the National Board Examinations? How does the school assist students who do not pass?

Evaluations

8. How are students evaluated academically? How are clinical evaluations performed?
9. Is there a formal mechanism in place for students to evaluate their professors and attending physicians? What changes have been made recently as a result of this feedback?

Counseling/Student Support

10. What kind of academic, personal, financial, and career counseling is available to students? Are these services also offered to their spouses and dependents/children?
11. Is there a mentor/advisor system? Who are the advisors—faculty members, other students, or both?
12. How diverse is the student body? Are there support services or organizations for ethnic minorities and women?

Facilities

13. Tell me about the library and extracurricular facilities (i.e., housing and athletic/recreational facilities).
14. Are there computer facilities available to students? Are they integrated into the curriculum/learning?
15. What type of clinical sites—ambulatory, private preceptors, private hospitals, rural settings—are available or required for clerkships? Does this school allow for students to do rotations at other institutions or internationally?
16. Is a car necessary for clinical rotations? Is parking a problem?

Financial Aid

17. What is the current tuition and fees? Is this expected to increase yearly? If so, at what rate?
18. Are there stable levels of federal financial aid and substantial amounts of university/medical school endowment aid available to students?
19. Are there students who have an "unmet need" factor in their budget? If so, where do these students come up with the extra funds?
20. Are spouses and dependents/children covered in a student's budget?
21. Is someone available to assist students with budgeting and financial planning?
22. Does this school provide guidance to its students, and to its graduates/alumni, on debt management?

Student Involvement

23. What medical school committees (e.g., curriculum committee) have student representation?
24. Are students involved in (required or voluntary) community service?
25. How active is the Student Council/Government? Are there other student organizations?

Policies

26. Is there an established protocol for dealing with student exposure to infectious diseases? Is disability insurance provided to cover this exposure?
27. Does this school provide, or does the student pay for, vaccinations against Hepatitis B or prophylactic AZT treatment in case of a needle-stick or accident?
28. Is there a school Honor Code? Is there a grievance process/procedure? Are the students involved?

Residency

29. May I see a list of residency programs to which this school's recent graduates were accepted?

Questions to Ask Yourself

30. Does this school have strengths in the type of medicine (primary versus specialized care, urban versus rural practice environment, academic medicine versus private practice) that I will want to practice?
31. Would I be happy at this school (for at least the next four years)?

Advice from a Smith MD about her experiences interviewing:

"I had a good time at them — they kept me on my toes, but there was definitely no reason to have a panic attack.! I strongly advise anyone to keep current with the news. Everyone that goes in there can talk about wanting to help people, so it's essential to be able to intelligently discuss other topics! Go and do your best — and have fun!"

Good luck!

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