Interviewing at Medical/Dental Schools

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Cornell Career Services
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The Medical School Application

“When applying to a medical school, you are asking them to honor your request for admission. It is important to keep in mind that entry into medical school is a privilege and not a right, no matter how outstanding an applicant’s grades or experiences are.”

- 101 Tips on Getting Into Medical School, p. 83.

“The interview is the medical school’s way of assessing a student’s personality and how this personality will fit into the environment of that particular institution.”

# Acceptance Data Worth Noting

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Data: For applicants who earned an undergraduate degree at Cornell and who have authorized AMCAS to release their outcome information to Cornell. Does not include results for D.O. schools or the Texas school application service.
Purpose of the Interview

- Verify information submitted in written materials
- Gather additional information
  - May include probing into “red flags”
    - Course grades, “incompletes”, withdraws (W)
    - Institutional actions
- Make judgments and decisions
- Recruit applicants
- Your chance to tell your story
  - Telling your story ≠ telling a story
- Update your application
Increase Your Chance for Success: Create a Plan

• Prepare
• Implement
• Follow Up
Increase Your Chance for Success: Create a Plan

- Prepare
- Implement
- Follow Up
Prepare

• Organize proper attire
  – Practice your interview attire prior to the day of the interview.

• Organize your time so that you can handle interviews while balancing academics

• Stay informed on health-related issues
  – Healthcare reform
  – Breakthroughs in treatment
  – Medical/pharmaceutical developments (positive and negative)
  – World health situations
  – News on ethical issues
  – Important public-health concerns
Prepare

• Learn about interview styles
  – Traditional one-on-one
    • Open file (informed interview)
    • Closed file (blind interview)
  – Panel
  – Group
  – Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs)
  – Structured vs. unstructured

• Review and practice interview questions
Prepare

• Learn about multiple mini interviews (MMIs)
  – What they are
  – Why they’re used
  – How to approach

• Medical schools of interest utilizing the MMI format
  – Stanford
  – UC Schools (Davis, LA, Irvine, SD)
  – U Mass
  – Michigan St.
  – Rutgers, Robert Wood Johnson
    • CASPER test
  – Albany
  – New York Medical College
  – NYU
  – SUNY Upstate
  – Duke
  – VA Tech
Prepare

• Learn about multiple mini interviews (MMIs)
  – What they are
  – Why they’re used
  – How to approach

• Dental schools of interest utilizing the MMI format
  – Michigan
  – Midwestern University – Illinois
  – Marquette
  – ASDOH (Arizona)
  – Ohio State University
  – SUNY Buffalo (hybrid MMI and traditional)
Prepare

• Review and practice sample interview questions

• Practice using Optimal Interview
  – Gain access at career.cornell.edu

• Schedule a mock interview
  – Career Services – 255-5296

• Create your own list of questions that you want to answer during the interview experience
Prepare

• Know what to expect on a typical interview day
  – Check in (early): receive schedule
  – Orientation
  – Tour (either before or after lunch)
  – First interview, second interview, or MMI series
  – Lunch
  – Talks on financial aid, special programs
  – Class attendance
Prepare

• Know what to expect on a particular interview day
  – Review school’s website
  – Know what kind of interview the school holds
  – Find out what the day will be like
  – Learn about your interviewer, if you know who that is (even on day of interview you can do this!)
  – Stay current on phone messages, e-mail in case you are notified of any last-minute changes
  – Make sure your voicemail box is not full (and has an appropriate greeting)
Increase Your Chance for Success: Create a Plan

- Prepare
- Implement
- Follow Up
Implement

- Review your 20Q document
  - How have you evolved over these last 10+ months?

- Review your AMCAS application and school secondary
  - Know where you are and what you have told them about yourself

- Review changes to your credentials since completion of your primary and secondary applications
You Must Communicate in Person

• Your passion for medicine
• Why you’re a good candidate
• How you have prepared
  – Courses, activities, self-education
• Your commitment to service
• Why this is the right school for you

It is not enough that you have already communicated these things in writing!
How You Communicate Is Critical

• Understand the question before you begin answering
• Articulate carefully and be articulate
• Answer thoroughly but don’t be too long-winded
• Demonstrate ability to think critically
• Show that you can be flexible and resilient, and can handle stress
• Speak about what you have learned from different situations (particularly potential problem areas)
Non-Verbal Communication Also Matters

- The handshake
- Eye contact
- Facial expressions (remember to smile!)
- Posture
- Gestures
- Personal space
Increase Your Chance for Success: Create a Plan

- Prepare
- Implement
- Follow Up
Follow Up

• Thank you notes
  – For MMI, it would be appropriate to send to office of admissions

• Make your own notes on the experience
  – If you have multiple interviews, they can begin to blur and you want good, objective information to base a decision on if you receive multiple acceptances

• Meet with an advisor to review the experience and develop a strategy for future improvement

• Attend additional health careers workshops on topics of interest (particularly on follow-up actions)

• Get involved in the Applicant Meet-Ups
Some Common Problems Observed in Mock Interviews

• Why particular school/location
• Worried about being perfect “cookie-cutter” candidate
• Difficulty in…
  – Answering the question, “What makes you unique?”
  – **Answering the question, “Why do you want to be a doctor?”**
  – Conveying confidence and enthusiasm
  – Persevering after a bad interview
  – Giving concise yet detailed answers
  – Awkward answers to questions
Miscellaneous Tips

- You have control over your end of the conversation
- Know what you think about life and death
- Be prepared for tough ethical questions
- You’re always “on the record” in interview situations
  - Never be too casual and always be polite/respectful to everyone you meet
  - Don’t be too informal with students
- Don’t talk over applicants in group interview situations
- Be honest to yourself and your personality
- Be honest; it’s OK to say “I don’t know”
Miscellaneous Tips

• Be prepared to back up your statements with evidence and solid reasoning
  – Don’t focus on providing “the right answer” (there might not be one)
• Practice an interview at least once in the attire you plan to wear
• Be proud of yourself and get comfortable speaking about your accomplishments
• Carry some cash; you can’t rely on being able to use debit cards (and you don’t want to be in the position of having to borrow money while on an interview)
Many applicants have essentially identical objective credentials, but there’s only ONE OF YOU.

It’s important to practice, but avoid spitting out rehearsed responses.

Remain calm, open-minded, light-hearted.

Try to enjoy yourself.

Be ready for “curve ball” questions (difficult ethical questions, seemingly unrelated questions, esoteric factual ones).

Consider why they would ask those.
Mock MMI

• 2 minutes to view and think about question

• 5 minutes for interview

• 2-3 minutes for interviewer to record feedback
The apartment next door is for rent. The previous tenants were nothing but trouble and have been evicted. Your landlord tells you about a new tenant he has found with more promising credentials. As he tells you about him, you realize that he is one of the drug addicts who was in treatment at a halfway house you volunteer at. You know that this person has a history of relapsing and may not have been completely honest on the application form.

Do you warn your landlord about the person's history or do you keep your knowledge confidential?
Interview Preparation Resources

• Individual school’s admissions website

• *Vault Insider Guide to Medical School Admissions*

• *101 Tips on Getting Into Medical School*, by Jennifer C. Welch

• *Health Professions Admissions Guide: Strategy for Success*, Carol Baffi-Dugan and Robert E. Cannon, co-editors
Upcoming Programs and Events of Interest

• “You Probably Thought All Medical Doctors Have MD After Their Name...So, What is a DO?”
  – Dr. Robert J Corona, Jr, DO, MBA
  – Chair of Pathology, Upstate University Hospital
  – Tuesday, September 15; 4:30 pm; 253 Mallott

• PhysAssist Information Session
  – Thursday, September 24; 4:30 pm; 115 RCK

• So...You Think You Want To Be a Doctor? Consider the Changing Role of the Physician in American Society Over the Past 50 Years! Part I
  – Dr. Jeffrey Lewis, MD, DMD
  – Cayuga Facial Surgery
  – Wednesday, September 30; 4:30 pm; 142 GSH

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Questions?

“Action is the foundational key to all success.”

Pablo Picasso