Preparing for Medical and Dental School Admissions Interviews

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Cornell Career Services  
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“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 Medical School Interview

“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 for Medical School Applicants from Cornell University: 2011-2013

### Undergraduates Who Used HECU

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*Data are 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. school applications 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”
• Make judgments and decisions
• Recruit applicants
The Medical School Interview

- Your chance to tell your story
- Telling your story ≠ telling a story
Increase Your Chance for Success: Create a Plan

- Prepare
- Implement
- Follow Up
Prepare

- Organize proper attire
- 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
  – Panels
  – Group
  – Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs)
  – Open file (informed interview)
  – Closed file (blind interview)
  – Structured vs. unstructured

• Review and practice interview questions
Prepare

- Learn About MMIs
  - What they are
  - Why they’re used
  - How to approach
Prepare

- Review and practice sample interview questions
  - See Common Interview Questions, pp. 93–96 of Vault Insider Guide
  - Use other resources mentioned later in presentation
- Practice using Optimal Interview
  - Gain access at career.cornell.edu
- Schedule a mock interview
- Create your own list of questions that you want to answer during the interview
Prepare

• Know what to expect on a typical interview day
  - Check in (early): receive schedule
  - Orientation
  - Tour
  - 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
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
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
Follow Up

• Thank yous
• 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 improvement next time
• Attend additional health careers workshops on topics of interest (particularly on follow-up actions)
Some Common Problems Seen in Mock Interviews

- Why particular school/location
- Worried about being perfect “cookie-cutter” candidate
- Difficulty in...
  - Answering the question “What makes you unique?”
  - Conveying confidence and enthusiasm
  - Persevering after a bad interview
  - Giving concise yet detailed answers
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 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’ll wear for the real thing
- 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)
Miscellaneous Tips

- 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
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
Interview Preparation Resources

- https://www.aamc.org/students/aspiring/basics/280914/interview.html
- Gradschool.com
- Futuredoctor.net
- US News & World Report Blog
- Miscellaneous links found in a Google search for “medical school interview questions”
Mock Interviews

- Thursday, September 11
  - 5–7 p.m, 210 Barnes Hall
  - Limited to attendees at today’s program
  - Sign up today!

- Arts & Sciences Students:
  - Sign up through CCNet with Ana Adinolfi

- Optimal Interview
Med School Applicant Meet-Ups

• Next One:
  – Friday, September 19
  – 4:45 p.m., 103 Barnes Hall
Questions?
GO CONFIDENTLY IN THE DIRECTION OF YOUR DREAMS

HENRY DAVID THOREAU