



Options for Individuals Considering a Career in Medicine

“Medicine offers many careers.” New opportunities are emerging with each advance in medical knowledge.

Physicians have a wide range of responsibilities which may include: diagnosing disease, supervising the care of patients, prescribing treatment, participating in improved delivery of health care and patient education.

“Although most physicians provide direct patient care, some concentrate on basic or applied research, others become teachers or administrators, and still others combine various elements of these activities. Often students make these career decisions near the completion of medical school.”

“Graduating students select an area of medicine for further training and eventual practice. Some physicians practice in the generalist specialties of general internal medicine, general pediatrics, or family practice. Other physicians choose from among the following specialties: allergy and immunology; anesthesiology; dermatology; emergency medicine; obstetrics and gynecology; pathology; psychiatry; radiology; and surgery (general, neuro, orthopedic, plastic, urology, or vascular).”

“New patterns of practice are emerging. Physicians may be salaried, in partnership, or self-employed.” A physician may choose from such varied settings as group practice, a managed care system, hospital, laboratory, industry, military, university, government, or various combinations of these.

“The wide range of practice options, specialty choices, and availability of locations provides substantial diversity to individuals choosing a career in medicine. Benefits include the reward of caring

for others, the intellectual challenge of medicine, and the social and economic rewards of providing services that are highly valued by society. The demands of a medical career are great in terms of the time, energy, and responsibility for other people’s lives and a commitment to continuing service and education is essential.”

Educational Preparation

“What does it take to be a physician? Briefly, it takes physical, emotional and intellectual stamina; the desire to work with and for people; and, particularly, the ability to think logically and to use common sense. The educational pipeline involves four (occasionally three) years of college, four years of medical school, and three or more years of residency.”

Most students opt to take the traditional route to medical school which constitutes apply to medical school during their senior year of undergraduate college. Other individuals, who have completed college and perhaps embarked on another career before deciding to apply to medical school, often take advantage of post-baccalaureate programs. These programs offer the opportunity to participate in advising/counseling programs for premedical students. Lastly, others may enroll in programs beginning after high school graduation that combine the undergraduate college and medical school curricula into one program (combined college/medical school programs). “Some of these programs result from special partnerships between a school of medicine and a particular undergraduate college and thus require enrollment in the respective undergraduate institution.”

Advice for High School Students

Choosing a medical career or choosing to enter into the application process for a combined college/medical school program is a big decision. “It is important that high school students considering medicine weigh the relative advantages of combined undergraduate/medical school programs with those of the traditional route and consult carefully with high school advisors as well as appropriate college and medical school personnel in making a decision. Medical schools accepting students in combined undergraduate college/medical school programs will be looking for high level of academic achievement, maturity, well-developed communications skills, intellectual abilities, and social adjustment as well as a carefully thought-through career decision. Normally students applying for combined programs will have had some health-related experience while in high school.”

The quoted text contained in this article was taken from Chapter 2, “Options for Individuals Considering a Career in Medicine.” Of the Medical School Admission Requirements, 1996-97, United States and Canada, published annually by the Association of American Medical Colleges. For more information on careers in medicine or to order a copy of this official guide, contact the AAMC at (202) 828-0416. A new edition is available each April.