

East Carolina University

The Career Center

Your Success is Our Business

Preparing for the Medical School Interview

Purpose of the Medical School Interview

The purpose of the Medical School interview is to help admissions officers assess characteristics and factors that go beyond your academic performance. Admissions officers utilize the interview as a time to examine whether candidates possess interpersonal and effective communication skills that are needed to pursue the challenging profession. Medical schools also use the interview as an opportunity to examine whether prospective students are truly interested in the field and their particular school and if students are in fact prepared for the psychological, ethical and emotional demands of the profession. It is up to you to convey your potential as a student and willingness to receive appropriate guidance, while concurrently exhibiting your potential for moving forth in the field as a medical professional. Prospective medical students should keep in mind that entry into medical school is extremely competitive and requires a lot of time and preparation on the part of the interviewer; therefore you should plan and prepare properly for this critical element of the admissions process, regardless of how strong your credentials are.

What are admission officers looking for and how will they make their decision?

- Successful completion of required undergraduate courses
- Grade point average
- Performance on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
- Extracurricular activities - especially those reflecting public or health-related service, volunteer work, and other evidence of your initiative
- Letters of recommendation from undergraduate health professions advisors and faculty members as well as physicians and other members of the health professions, community leaders, and other individuals who have employed you or supervised your volunteer experience
- Interviews with medical school admissions committees. Unlike colleges, which hold interviews early in the application process, medical schools arrange them near the end. As they narrow their selection of candidates, most medical schools invite the most promising applicants to interview with faculty and other members of the admissions committee.

Interview format

Interviews for medical schools are by invitation only. If you have to reschedule an interview, be sure to contact admission officials and provide adequate timing for rescheduling. The interview format may differ at some schools. Some medical schools conduct separate, one-on-one interviews; some prefer to conduct individual interviews with a panel of faculty members and student affairs representatives. On the other hand some panels will choose to interview a group of candidates concurrently. Typically, most medical schools conduct interviews between October and April, allotting between 30 minutes to one hour for the interview.

Interview Preparation

Prior to the interview, clarify with admission officials whether the interview is a final step in the selection process, or the beginning process of screening prospective students. This will help you prepare accordingly.

- Prior to the interview make a list of strengths, accomplishments, and awards received. Be sure to review your application materials such as your personal statement, academic transcript, and extracurricular involvement.
- Know who your audience will be. If possible find out exactly who will interview you. You can use this information to find out important accolades or contributions to the profession made by admission officials.

- Conduct research on the school's curriculum, medical program, and faculty prior to the interview. This illustrates your genuine interest in the medical school.
- Develop a clear picture and responses to how you see yourself fitting into the program.
- Find a list of typical interview questions.
- Take time to develop responses to the questions.
- Practice answering questions with a career coach from the ECU Career Center or a family member or friend.

Selling yourself in the Interview

- Visualize yourself being successful in the interview
- Ideally, create a discussion environment instead of a cross-examination environment.
- Have a game plan. What do you want the interviewer to know about you when you leave? How do you want to be remembered?
- Look for opportunities to give **SARs** [provide concrete examples and responses to questions that articulate a specific situation, action taken, and results achieved] followed by probing questions.
- Dress conservatively in professional business attire. Appropriate attire for women may include dresses or suits with a jacket. Appropriate attire for men may include suits with a jacket and tie. Excessive jewelry, make up, piercings, and tattoos should be avoided or properly covered up.
- Arrive ten to fifteen minutes early. This gives time to deal with any last minute changes.
- Maintain a professional decorum at all times outside of the interview itself. Treat everyone you encounter with respect, this includes other applicants, custodial workers, and receptionists.
- Maintain proper posture during the interview. Be sure to relax but avoid slouching or fidgeting. Also, maintain appropriate and good eye contact with the interviewer. If there is more than one interviewer, maintain an unbiased eye contact and concentrate on the person who has asked the question.
- Listen to the complete question before responding.
- Try avoiding word fillers such as "uhs", "like", and "you know" in your answers.
- Monitor the pace of your answers to questions. More than likely, you will be a bit nervous and will tend to talk more quickly than usual. Also the utilization of appropriate pauses between the question and your answer allows you to slow down and think of an appropriate response ahead of time.

Sample Interview Questions

Interview questions are formulated to examine the prospective medical student's knowledge and interest of the medical profession, intellectual and analytical skills, as well as capability of expressing and defending thoughts on strong issues. Remember, you can also do web searches to find additional sample questions.

General open-ended questions

- Tell me about yourself. (Not as innocent as it may seem. Prepare a thirty second Power Greeting featured on page 10 of the ECU Career Success Guide, which stresses what you want them to know about you. Be careful that it does not sound canned).
- What are your strengths? What is a weakness? (Turn weaknesses into strengths/end on a positive note)
- Have you always done the best work of which you were capable?
- What will be the toughest aspect of medical education for you?
- Tell me about a major accomplishment and how you achieved it.
- Tell me about a time you assumed a leadership role.
- What characteristics does a good leader need?
- Tell me about a situation in which you showed initiative.
- Tell me about a time you failed. What did it teach you about yourself?
- Tell me about a group in which you were involved. How did you contribute to make this group achieve a goal?
- How will you handle the demands of medical school?
- What life experiences have you had that have made you a better person?

- Who was the best teacher you have had and why?
- What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?
- How well do you feel you function under pressure? Give an example.
- Tell me about something creative that you have done.
- What about you would make your patients want to see you and no one else?
- What do you do to relax?

Interest and Knowledge of the Profession

- Why are you interested in this field?
- How do you see yourself contributing to the field of medicine?
- What volunteer experiences, internships, and research projects have helped you solidify your desire to enter the field of medicine?
- In what kind of setting would you like to work?
- What percentage of your time do you anticipate devoting to basic research and clinical medicine?
- What qualities would you look for in a doctor?
- Tell me about the patient from whom you learned the most.
- What do you think is the hardest thing about being a physician?
- What can you contribute to the field of Medicine?
- Did you have the opportunity to get involved in any research during undergrad?
- How do you feel your undergraduate education has prepared you for a career in medicine?
- What are your thoughts on the relationship between other medical physicians and medical staff?
- What concerns do you have about becoming a medical physician?
- If you do not get accepted into medical school, what will you do?

Professional Ethics

There are a variety of important and controversial issues that may be brought up in the interview. These ethical questions will typically fall into the following categories: determinations of death, the right to die, care of the elderly, patient privacy, children's and parent's rights, care of the mentally handicapped, rights of the handicapped, rights of the physically handicapped, rights of the terminally ill, rights of defective newborns, abortion rights, religious rights to reject certain medical procedures, experimental treatments, etc. You should consider your positions and stance on these issues prior to the interview.

- Describe an ethical dilemma you have faced.
- Describe a time when you stood up for yourself or something. What were the consequences?
- What ethical standards will you promote in your work as a Medical Physician?
- You observe a fellow medical student cheating on an examination. What would you do?
- How would you tell a patient just diagnosed with cancer that he has only a few weeks to live?
- What are your thoughts on euthanasia?
- During a routine physical examination of an 8 year old girl you discover unambiguous evidence that she has been physically abused over a period of time. Both her parents are in the waiting room. How would you respond to this incident?
- A pregnant 13-year-old teenager comes into your office seeking an abortion. What would you do? Would you inform her parents?

Knowledge of Current Medical Policies and Issues

- List three issues that confront medicine today. Of the three, which is the most important and why?
- What is the difference between an HMO and a PPO? Which system do you prefer and why?

- What are your feelings regarding the current Healthcare reform? How do you believe it will affect you as a medical physician?
- How do you feel about the new HIPPA regulations?
- What role do you think physicians should play in the implementation of health care development?
- What strategies would you take to improve access to health care in this country?
- What are your views on the latest changes to the Medicare program?
- Do physicians have the right to deny care to patients on Medicaid?
- What are your views on alternative medicine?
- What do you think should be done to control health care costs in this country?
- Where do you see healthcare in 20 years?

Questions Applicants Might Ask an Interviewer

The interview is also an opportunity for prospective medical students to convey their interest and inquire regarding the Medical School. Be sure to ask questions when appropriate, it illustrates your keen interest in the medical school and the profession.

- What characteristics distinguish this program?
- What criteria are used for choosing recipients?
- What is the selection timeline?
- Where are recent alumni employed?
- What types of financial assistance is offered? Are there any scholarships or fellowships available? How do I apply?
- Do most students publish an article/conduct research prior to graduation?
- I've read articles written by _____ and _____. To what extent are students involved in assisting these faculty members with related research projects?

Interview Follow-Up

- Prepare a thank-you card/letter or email after the interview.
- Be prepared to follow-up with the interviewer using various forms- a letter, email, phone call.
- Use the interview as an experience and preparation for future interviews.
- Evaluate your responses to questions and make adjustments for other interviews.
- If you are on a hold list, you can send additional information to strengthen your application and admission into the school. For instance, if you have recent awards or volunteer experience that did not appear on your original application you can develop a brief (less than one page) addendum and send it to the school. However be sure to use discretion. Do not bombard the school with extraneous information such as additional recommendations.
- Relax and stay optimistic

Monitoring your Application Status

Typically prospective students are notified within two to four weeks after the interview of their application status. An increasingly popular trend (especially on the east coast) is the practice of waiting until February or March on a specified date to notify students of their application status.