

Careers in Health Care

As a student preparing for a career in professional health care, you have many options and schools from which to choose. Many undergraduate students interested in health professions are attracted to human medicine that includes [Allopathic medicine](#), [Osteopathic medicine](#) and [Podiatric medicine](#). Other similar professions include:

[Dentistry](#) (Specialties in Endodontics, Oral Pathology, Oral Surgery, Orthodontics, Pedodontics, Periodontics, and Prosthodontics) [Click here](#) to go to the American Student Dental Association (ASDA).

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[Veterinary Medicine](#)

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[Medical Technology](#)

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[Physical Therapy](#)

[Occupational Therapy](#)

[Radiologic Technology](#)

[Health and Hospital Administration](#)

[Public Health](#) (Specialties in Administration, Biostatistics, Environmental Health Sciences, Epidemiology, Education, Health Planning and Nutrition)

[Audiology/Speech Pathology](#)

[Biomedical Engineering](#)

[Chiropractic Medicine](#)

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[Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine](#)

[Genetic Counseling](#)

[Anesthesiologist Assistant](#)

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[Counseling-related Occupations](#)

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Even if you have a strong interest in one career now, for a variety of reasons, it is still important to have an alternative career in mind. Not everyone applying to professional schools can be accepted; students' academic interests, personal needs and financial priorities can change. In choosing a career, it is most important to understand your own values, interests, talents and abilities, and investigate all your options before making a decision.

What is allopathic medicine, especially compared to osteopathic and podiatric medicine? Allopathic medicine is practiced by someone with an M.D. (Doctor of Medicine) degree, and the practice includes treatment of disease through drugs and surgery, as well as a concern for preventive medicine and public health.

Osteopathic medicine is practiced by someone with a D.O. (Doctor of Osteopathy) degree, and the practice includes what was just described for the M.D. plus a unique procedure called manipulative therapy. Manipulative therapy involves moving various parts of the anatomy that are under stress or

distortion in order to correct musculoskeletal disorders, help restore normal functioning of other body systems and relieve pain. Osteopathic physicians are not bone specialists, neither are they chiropractors. Osteopathic medicine also emphasizes the total body concept in which the patient is viewed as a self-regulating and self-healing person progressing through an entire lifespan, not merely a periodically diseased organism.

Both M.D.s and D.O.s train for four years in medical school, take an internship for further study, can complete a residency program for specialization, and are state-licensed. Most D.O.s are general practitioners - 87% of all osteopaths compared to only 30% of all allopathic physicians. The greatest demand for specialists is definitely in primary care: family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology. In addition, there currently is a demand for specialists in preventive medicine, geriatrics, medical genetics, oncology, neonatology, psychiatry and emergency medicine.

As attempts are made to make health care reform a reality, there will be greater emphasis on careers that provide direct patient services, like physician assistants. They are highly skilled health practitioners who, under the supervision of a physician, take medical histories, perform examinations, order and interpret tests and diagnose and treat illnesses. Training for physician assistants varies with the program, although usually requires two years of classes and clinical rotations in areas of medical specialties.

Podiatric medicine is a specialty in the care and treatment of feet, practiced by a podiatrist with a D.P.M. (Doctor of Podiatric Medicine) degree. The four years in a college of podiatric medicine are similar to other kinds of medical school but focus on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases and disorders of the human foot, using medical, surgical, palliative, bio-mechanical, manipulative and electrical techniques. A podiatrist may specialize in podiatric surgery, orthopedics and biomechanics, podiatric medicine, podopediatrics, podogeriatrics, or podiatric sports medicine. There is currently a shortage of podiatrists, and as our population increases its interest in sports and exercising, and as the number of older people increases, the need for podiatrists is predicted to increase even more. Information can be found at www.aacpm.org and www.apma.org.

Dentistry involves the prevention, diagnosis and correction of disease and injury to the teeth and supporting structures of the mouth. Four years of dental school lead to the D.D.S. (Doctor of Dental Surgery) or, less frequently, the D.M.D. (Doctor of Dental Medicine) degree. There are eight specialties within dentistry and all dentists are licensed to prescribe drugs and perform surgery. Additional information can be found at www.ada.org and www.adea.org.

Optometry is a career requiring four years of education in a school of optometry leading to an O.D. (Doctor of Optometry) degree. Optometrists diagnose and prescribe lenses and other optical aids to correct vision, not to be confused with ophthalmologists who are physicians specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases or opticians who make and sell glasses. Information can be found at www.opted.org.

The process of choosing the specific schools to which you will apply usually begins in the sophomore year when you are able to assess your own academic abilities and are able to match them to the requirements of particular schools. You should consult the various handbooks of professional school requirements to get an idea of the types of students they accept and to get some information about the schools - size of student body and faculty, location, curriculum, educational philosophy, sources of financial support and research opportunities. Another important factor is whether or not a school gives admission preferences to state residents (along with lower tuition). Information about particular schools can be obtained by consulting the school's web sites, writing directly to the school, consulting its catalog, or especially by making a personal visit to the school.

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