

## ***MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEWS***



### **INTRODUCTION**

Applying to medical school can be a long-term arduous project. You begin this process as soon as you decide that medical school is your goal. Unfortunately, after many years of painstaking preparation and hard work, a significant number of quality applicants fail to gain admission into the school of their choice. Why?

It is obvious that admission to competitive programs in medicine depends on numerous factors that primarily include:

1. Undergraduate academic scores
  - Overall GPA
  - Life/Physical Science GPA
  - Non-Science GPA
2. MCAT's
3. Recommendations
4. Personal Statement
5. **Medical School Interview**
6. Reputation of Undergraduate Institution

### **INTERVIEW INVITATIONS**

Although on average, less than one-fourth of all applicants are invited for a personal interview, medical schools will not accept a candidate without one. This should suggest just how important the interview is in the overall selection process. Among those students deemed acceptable candidates according to the first four categories listed above, most medical schools typically invite at least three prospective candidates for interviews for each new class opening. Only one of these invitees will be offered admission. For

this reason, you must realize that a strong interview represents an important piece of the total consideration given applicants for admission.

### **CONSEQUENCE OF A POOR INTERVIEW**

No matter how well qualified academically you may be, a poor interview definitely reduces your chance of receiving an acceptance. According to the Dean of Admissions at Stanford University School of Medicine, “Far too many interviewees are unprepared for the interview process”. **It is essential that you take these interviews very seriously.**

Many well-qualified medical school candidates ruin their chances for acceptance by making poor impressions during the medical school interview process. Although they have top grades and MCAT scores, many students:

- are unable to appropriately articulate their goals
- fail to explain their fit for a specific school
- cannot explain any obvious weaknesses in their application
- do not sell their strengths
- fail to demonstrate emotional maturity and common social skills
- fail to demonstrate a passion for medicine
- do not ask intelligent questions
- are unable to understand the Admissions Office goals
- demonstrate weak verbal/communication skills
- talk too much
- fail to send a thank you letter to the primary interviewer

### **THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

Understanding that a personal interview will be required for acceptance to medical school, they typically take place at the medical school and applicants are normally interviewed by two or more members of an admissions board. The interviewers can be faculty members of the school, practicing physicians in the area, current medical students, or professional staff members of the medical school admissions office.

Without question, for most students, the medical school interview can be the most nerve-racking part of the entire candidate admission process. The typical format of the personal interview varies from school to school. The interviews can be one on one in the interviewer’s office or they can involve a more formal panel type of interview. Information about you available to the interviewers may vary considerably. Some medical schools prefer that all candidates are interviewed “blind”. Under these conditions the interviewer has no access to the student’s application and has no previous knowledge of the candidate. Other schools provide the interviewers with all the

background information possible, and still others may use a semi-blind format withholding some information from the interviewer, for example GPA and MCAT scores perhaps. Note that Thomas Jefferson typically uses a one on one interview style with candidate files that are available to the interviewers for review. Be aware that “stress” interviews, although not common, are usually designed to challenge your opinions and are done on purpose to see how you handle yourself. If possible try and find out which type of format a school is using in order to better prepare for your interview. No matter what the nature of the interview format, the interviewee must be prepared to be articulate, show confidence without arrogance, and avoid “yes” and “no” answers to questions.

### **IMPORTANCE OF YOUR PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Much of your success at the interview depends on your personal effectiveness (eye contact, handshake, personal attire, greeting, confidence, physical demeanor, etc.) as much as your answers to questions. For this reason, practicing your interview with classmates is most important.

### **INTERVIEW INVITATIONS FOR HSAEC STUDENTS**

Medical schools begin inviting applicants for interviews early in the fall. Since most institutions admit students on a rolling basis, there are more openings available in September than there are in the following February. Consequently, applying early is definitely advantageous. Note that early applicants are perceived by admission boards as having a stronger and more sincere desire for the pursuit of a medical career than those who apply much later in the fall. It is strongly recommended that you apply early.

### **PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW**

Find out everything that you can about the school that has invited you for an interview. Learn something about its history, reputation of its faculty, or anything that makes them particularly unique. Such information not only helps you become more excited about the school but it also provides a base for things to ask about at the interview.

Are they a big research institution? If so is there a particular research area that you might possess interest? Some schools are interested in recruiting researchers (MD/PhD’s) and may offer financial scholarships/grants for such individuals.

Do they specialize in certain areas of medicine, perhaps primary care for instance?

Where does this institution rank in the latest ratings for medical schools. Jefferson Medical College, known for primary care, ranked 64<sup>th</sup> in research among 130 rated institutions evaluated in the 2008 US News and World Report for instance.

Do they offer a traditional approach to medical education or are they trying something viewed as innovative? Many institutions use a problem-based learning approach while attempting to get their students into clinical settings as early as possible. Thomas Jefferson definitely stresses the importance of strong clinical experiences.

How do they evaluate performance? What is their grading philosophy? It can vary from a straight Pass/Fail to a more traditional High Honors/Honors/ Pass/No Pass system. Note that this latter system of evaluation may be more important when competing for residency positions.

## **IMPORTANCE OF MOCK INTERVIEWS**

It is well known that the best way to improve your performance is by engaging in practice interviews with individuals who have previously experienced the interview process. In mock interviews, experienced students can help you identify possible weak spots and offer suggestions that would better prepare yourself for this aspect of the admissions process. Before you ever set foot on a medical school campus, it is important to find out whether your answers are convincing or whether your approach needs some extra "work/preparation" before the big day. Remember also that your success in the interview depends on your personal effectiveness (eye contact, handshake, greeting, confidence, etc.) as well as your answers to questions. Practicing all aspects of the interview process is important.

The purpose of a mock interview practice session is basically two-fold:

1. To simulate the potential questions asked in interviews
2. To replicate the atmosphere of formality that can sometimes make applicants worried to the point of non-productivity.

In preparation for medical school interviews in your Junior/Senior year as students in the Medical Scholars Program, I would recommend that you plan on attending one of the many "**Interview Preparation**" workshops sponsored by the Career Services Center (CSC) on Academy Street. Check the following website for information about scheduled interview training sessions:

<http://reslife2.hcs.udel.edu/MasterCalendar/MasterCalendar.aspx>

Upon completion of one of these workshops, it may be possible to receive one-on-one mock interview training from the CSC staff.

A typical interview lasts between 30 and 45 minutes. During that time the interviewer usually talks for about 20% of the time leaving the other 80% for you to make a favorable

impression. You must be as well prepared as possible to demonstrate your best professional self.

### **PROPER ATTIRE/APPEARANCE**

While business casual seems to be the norm in many different fields, dressing up in a suit for a medical school interview has really never gone out of style. Appropriate attire supports your image and you should understand the nature of the dress code in professional field of medicine of which you hope to enter. Research shows that within 4-7 minutes of an interview a typical interviewer decides whether or not to seriously consider you for admission partly based on your appearance, which is an important factor in the decision-making process.

Dress conservatively. Definitely shed your undergraduate student image. Don't come to the interview looking too casual. Wear clothing that does not make you stand out as anything other than neat, conservative, and well groomed.



**Men:** Well- fitted suit in navy, gray, or black (pinstripe or solid) or navy blazer and gray dress slacks; white or light blue dress shirt; tie (silk or silk-like) that contrasts with the color of your suit and contains understated patterns; dark socks (mid-calf) and dress shoes (lace-up, or leather slip-ons in either black or brown); leather belt that matches

your shoes. A full-length coat, as nice as you can afford, may be worn over your suit. Avoid flashy cuff links, rings and neck chains. No earrings. Your belt should match your shoes. If you have a beard or mustache, it should be clean and neatly trimmed. Cologne should be minimal or not worn at all.



**Women:** Well-fitted two-piece matched suit, blouse, pantsuit, or skirt with hosiery and basic dark flats or low pumps. Choose a dark or neutral shade like black, navy, brown or gray for your suit. Wear plain style, non-patterned hosiery; minimal or natural-looking makeup; and clean nails or clear nail polish that is not chipped. Nail length should not be excessively long. Minimize jewelry - avoid dangling earrings and wear no more than one ring per hand and a dress watch. Jewelry, scarves and other accessories will add a polished touch to any outfit. Use minimal natural looking makeup if any, small jewelry, and avoid BIG hair. Perfume should be minimal or not worn at all.

### **DEFINITE DON'TS OF INTERVIEW DRESSING:**

- No visible body piercings beyond conservative ear piercing
- No stale breath....well-brushed teeth and breath are a must
- No gum, candy, or other objects in your mouth
- No excessive or flashy jewelry
- No body odor....use deodorant
- No skirts above the knee-length
- No revealing or seductive clothing
- No pastel-colored suits or flowered fabrics
- No short sleeve shirts
- No “ties that tell a story” for men
- No unpolished shoes
- No visible tattoos
- No bad personal habits

## WHAT ARE INTERVIEWERS LOOKING FOR?

The role of the interviewer is to get to know you and help the Admissions Committee/Office select the best candidates from the pool of applicants that they invite for an interview. Looking at academic ability is only one factor. Remember that most applicants that they interview have very similar levels of academic accomplishments. They want to select the best fit for their institution. During the interview they will consider the applicant's strengths and weaknesses in areas that may include:



- ✓ Communication attributes
- ✓ Interpersonal skills
- ✓ Interest in serving the needs of others
- ✓ Depth of medical experience
- ✓ Maturity
- ✓ Ability to relate to people
- ✓ Motivation for medicine
- ✓ Ability to handle stress
- ✓ Realistic understanding of medicine
- ✓ Depth of extracurricular activities
- ✓ Right fit for medicine
- ✓ Right fit for Thomas Jefferson
- ✓ Etc.

## **SAMPLE MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **1. Personal Questions**

What are your hobbies?  
What are some things that bother you in a work setting?  
What do you like to do in your spare time? What do you do for fun?  
Tell me about your family.  
Tell me about yourself.  
What makes you special?  
How do you plan to support yourself through medical school?  
Questions about personal relationships, religious beliefs, etc (may be asked but not legal).  
How do you cope with grief?  
What are 3 things you want to change about yourself?  
Are you a friendly person?  
What do you have to offer that others don't have?  
What are your strengths?  
What are your weaknesses?  
How will your weaknesses play a role in medicine?  
Have you ever lived in a large city before?  
How do you deal with adversity?  
Tell me about your family life.  
What is your preferred way of learning and how do you learn best?  
Tell me about your study habits.  
Tell me about your sources for letters of recommendation.  
What is the biggest obstacle you have overcome in your life?  
What are your two best points? Two weakest points?  
Have you traveled abroad?  
What are your favorite books? Movies?

### **2. Motivation/Commitment to Medicine**

Why do you want to become a doctor?  
What is your choice of specialty? Why?  
What have you done that shows initiative? What did you learn from that experience?  
What leadership positions have you held in school?  
When did you first think seriously about going to medical school?  
Why did you choose to apply to Thomas Jefferson?  
Have you been accepted to other schools yet?  
Where else are you applying?  
What is your 1<sup>st</sup> choice?  
What did you dislike most about undergraduate school?  
Are you pursuing a career in medicine for the money? Prestige?

### **3. Education/Experience**

Be prepared for specific questions regarding your application materials (personal statement, MCAT scores, undergraduate transcript, letters of recommendation, etc.).

What science class did you dislike the most?

What classes did you struggle with during school?

What have you done to prepare yourself to be a doctor.

Why should we accept you over the other applicants who have applied to our program?

What was your favorite subject in school. Why?

What kinds of direct patient care experiences do you have?

Be prepared to discuss weaknesses in your academic transcripts and MCAT scores.

What experiences have you had with the medical profession?

What was your favorite science class? Why?

What types of volunteer work have you had?

Have you had any practical experiences in medicine?

Have you shadowed any physicians?

What experiences have you had working with people?

If you could do anything different in your education, what would you do?

### **4. Knowledge of Program**

What do you know about our school?

What makes the Medical College of Thomas Jefferson unique?

Are you a good fit for our program? Explain.

Are you a strong candidate for our program? Why?

What makes you special in comparison to all the other applicants?

### **5. Goals/Plans/Realistic Outlook**

How will you deal with the stress of school and this profession?

How do you plan to pay for medical school and living expenses?

Where do you plan to practice after you graduate?

What do you think you will struggle with during medical school?

Where would you like to practice? Rural or inner city areas?

What will you do if you are not accepted into medical school?

What do you think will be your greatest challenge in completing medical school or learning how to be a doctor?

Why would you be a good doctor?

What do you feel are the most important qualities in being a good doctor?

## **6. Exposure to Medicine/Current Events**

What politicians are currently impacting medicine? Do you agree with the decisions they are making?

Given a specific hypothetical medical scenario: How would you treat the patient?

What are some current controversial areas in medicine. Select one then give your opinion on it and defend that opinion.

What is your opinion of National Health Insurance?

Do you see any negatives in the (medical) profession?

What do you think about (patient rights, medical costs, HMO's, euthanasia, Phenphen, confidentiality, etc)? Discuss one issue that you feel is of primary concern in health care.

Identify three political issues that you feel are of great importance in the health care field.

What sorts of ethical problems can you see coming up in the medical profession?

Are any of your relatives physicians (dentists, etc)? If so, where did they go to school?

Why is medicine such an important field?

In your view, what is the most pressing problem facing medicine today?

Expect questions concerning what you think about ethics and healthcare (ie, abortion, cloning, euthanasia, etc.)

Be prepared to discuss managed healthcare and changes in the US healthcare system.

How would you describe the relationship between science, medicine, and art?

## **7. Breadth/Diversity**

Tell me three good things about others interviewing in your group.

How do you plan on dealing with the heterogeneous population here coming from such a homogeneous population in both race and religion?

## **8. Behavior-Based**

Say you were a doctor and your patient is terminal. The patient looks at you with hope and asks if he will make it. What do you tell him?

How might you calm a nervous patient?

What if you had a patient that did not pay.

What would you do if a doctor gave you orders that you know will harm the patient?

Pretend that you're the doctor. You see a patient who gives you some grief and complains. At the end of treatment he asks you if he was a good patient. What do you say?

Your supervising physician comes into work drunk. How would you handle the situation?

Imagine you are a physician. You are working with a patient who is refusing a treatment that you believe is necessary. What would you do?

Imagine you are a physician. How would you handle the following situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Please give me an example of how you would handle a stressful situation?

How would you deal with a patient who was treating you badly (assume other patients in the office can overhear)?

## **POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWERS**

In order to demonstrate your level of interest in pursuing professional education at Thomas Jefferson or any other medical school, you should be fully prepared to ask the interviewer(s) questions. While doing this, avoid asking questions on material already covered in the medical school websites or brochures. Intelligent and insightful questions will help demonstrate your most “professional self”.

- Are there opportunities for students to design, conduct, and publish their own research?
- Is there flexibility in the course work (the number of electives) and the timing of the courses (accelerating, decelerating, and time off) during the pre-clinical and clinical years?
- How do students from this medical school perform on National Board Examinations? How does the school assist students who do not pass?
- How are students evaluated academically? How are clinical evaluations performed?
- What kind of academic, personal, financial, and career counseling is available to students? Are these services also offered to their spouses?
- Is there a mentor/advisor system? Who are the advisors--faculty members, other students, or both?
- How diverse is the student body?
- Tell me about the library and extracurricular facilities.
- Are there computer facilities available to students? Are they integrated into the curriculum/learning?
- What type of clinical sites — ambulatory, private preceptors, private hospitals, rural settings — are available or required? Does this school allow for students to do rotations at other institutions or internationally.
- Is a car necessary? Is parking a problem?
- Is there budgeting & financial planning assistance?
- What medical school committees (e.g., curriculum committee) have student representation?
- Are students involved in (required or voluntary) community service?
- Does this school provide vaccinations against Hepatitis B or prophylactic AZT treatment in case of a needle-stick or accident?
- What are typical residency programs to which recent graduates were accepted?
- What would a typical 1<sup>st</sup> year academic work load look like?
- Do you have an orientation/mentoring program for 1<sup>st</sup> year students?

## **REFERENCES/RESOURCES**

**Ace The Med School Interview DVD and Workbook**, Inquarta Publishing, 2006

Alison Doyle, “How to Dress for an Interview”,  
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewattire/a/interviewdress.htm>

James Burnett, **Getting Into Medical School**, 13<sup>th</sup> Ed., UK: Trotman Co., 2008

Jeremiah Fleenor, MD, MBA, “The Medical School Interview: Secrets and a System for Success”, <http://www.studentdoctor.net/2008/02/trick-question/>

John Hopkins University, “The Medical School Interview”,  
<http://www.jhu.edu/~advising/PREPROF/ApplyingToMedicalSchoolBooklet1998-99/MedicalSchoolInterview.html>

Tara Kuther, Ph.D., “Medical School Interview: What You’ll Be Asked”,  
<http://gradschool.about.com/cs/medicalinterview/a/medquest.htm>

“Medical School Interview – Getting One Leg In”,  
<http://www.bestpremed.com/intviews.htm>

Pre-med Advisor, “Q&A”, [http://www.mymedline.com/premed/int\\_sampleqa.php3](http://www.mymedline.com/premed/int_sampleqa.php3)

Pre-Med Society at Virginia Commonwealth University, “Medical School Interviews: How To Prepare And How To Do Well”,  
<http://www.mommd.com/interview.shtml>

Steve Sciscione, “Interview Preparation.....”, Career Services Center, University of Delaware, <http://www.udel.edu/UMS/itv/csc/interview/>

Charles F. Thurber, M.D., “Preparing for the Medical School Admission Interview: Ethical and Economic Issues Confronting Today’s Practicing Physicians”,  
<http://www.admission-interview.com/>

University of California Berkley, “Medical School Interview Questions”,  
<http://career.berkeley.edu/Health/MedInterview.stm>

University of Montana, “Applying to Medical School – The Medical School Interview”, [http://www.cas.umt.edu/pre-med/apply\\_interview.htm](http://www.cas.umt.edu/pre-med/apply_interview.htm)

Virginia Tech, “Interview Attire: Guidelines for Men and Women”,  
<http://www.career.vt.edu/jobsearc/interview/appearnc.html#ATTIREMENWOMEN>