

INTERVIEWING FOR THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS

The interview is not a tool to determine qualification, but rather an opportunity to get the sense of whether the institution and the person are the right fit for one another.

The interview serves two major purpose: 1) gives the interviewer an opportunity to gather information about an applicant which will be useful in the decision-making process; and 2) allows the applicant to get to know more about the institution, its students, educational programs and opportunities, and philosophy.

Before the Interview

As you begin to prepare for your health professional school interview, think back on questions you have been asking yourself for many years, and prepare to answer questions that revolve around the following four areas that are listed below in order of importance.

Know Yourself

Know yourself and be able to articulate your goals, approach to life, and motivation for your particular health profession. Re-read your application and remember what you discussed. While reading, assess whether or not you really conveyed a sense of who you are. The interview will be another opportunity to communicate this sense. Go through sample questions not as a final step, but as a catalyst for areas you should self-examine. You will be “telling a story” in the interview, so think back to the very beginning of your motivation for the profession. Reflect on how you make choices, weigh pros and cons, and come to thoughtful conclusions. Think about your strengths and weaknesses. Think seriously about the areas that have been challenging and how they have helped you grow as a person. Ask yourself that deceptively simple question: Why do I want to become a doctor, dentist, pharmacist, etc.?

Know the Profession You Are Choosing

Every interview will be attempting to measure your motivation and knowledge in some way. Health Professional Schools want to enroll students who will be content and successful in school and beyond and who will not feel they have made a mistake in their choice of profession. Preparing for this part of the interview requires introspection, as well as reading, discussing, and experiencing things within the health profession and the wider health care arena. It is not so important WHAT your stand on an issue is, as long as you can discuss it intelligently and articulately.

Know the School

You have already done your research about the health professional school before you applied; however, how much do you really know about its mission, curriculum, clinical facilities, research agenda, or opportunities to do elective time away— perhaps an international setting? What is the student body like? What is the ‘atmosphere’ like? How are the students evaluated? What does the institution consider as their particular strengths or defined characteristics? Here is your chance to ask.

Although you want to have questions for your interviewer, you want to do as much homework in advance. Be sure you have reviewed the school’s website and any written materials that is made available to the applicants. The questions you ask about the health professional school should reveal the fact that you have already done your research and that you are enthusiastic about the institution. Be prepared to explain why you would like to attend their institution.

Know Current Issues

While no interviewer will expect you to know about the nuances of every world event, a general knowledge of major happenings is important. Be aware of what is going on in the world around you. Be able to discuss issues such as the ongoing crisis in the Middle East/UN involvement in various hot spots around the world, global efforts on the environment, the current Presidential initiatives, issues and the status of the healthcare debate, and major cultural and sports events.

Interview Formats

Depending on the culture and techniques used by the institution where you will be interviewing, you could face a panel of interviewers or a single representative of the school. Your interviewer may have an intimate foreknowledge of your application or may know nothing about you. Become familiar and be prepared for each of the different formats listed below.

Panel Interview

Panel interviews can be very intimidating with as many as six people asking you different questions. It will be important to acknowledge everyone in the room by making eye contact with each of the interviewers. A common mistake made by some candidates is to maintaining eye contact with only one person. While you should focus primarily on the individual who asks a question, acknowledge other people while you speak.

Free-For-All

In a free-for-all interview, the interviewer is not required to ask specific questions. He/she has access to all of your information, but may choose not to refer to it, and instead, try to determine whether you can carry on a conversation that flows and stays on topic. An interviewer might start with general conversation to gauge your ability to connect with others, but if things do not go well, the interviewer may resort to your file. Seize the opportunity to ask questions and engage in conversation.

Partial Blind Interview

A partial blind interview is one in which an interviewer only has a portion of your application. The interviewer may only have your transcripts or your personal essay to use as reference. As in a blind interview, you might be asked several behavioral questions or ethical and moral questions.

Blind Interview

In a blind interview, no personal information, application information, or academic performance has been disclosed to the interviewer. This type of interview is more likely going to address behavioral, subjective, and ethical questions. Behavioral questions ask candidates to describe a situation that prompted action and results. An example of a subjective question might be, "Tell me why you want to be a doctor?" Interviewers in blind interview sessions typically evaluate candidates on how articulately and effectively they answer questions.

Multiple Mini Interview (MMI)

During an MMI, the applicant rotates through a series of stations. Each station is timed and will require the applicant to evaluate a scenario or situation, answer a question, or even take part in a hands-on task. For example, one station may describe a scenario in which a physician prescribes a placebo to a patient. You may then be asked to name and discuss the ethical dilemmas presented by such the situation and to describe under what circumstances it would be appropriate for a physician to prescribe a placebo. Performing well in an MMI will give you an excellent opportunity to show that you not only have the academic qualifications to become a doctor or dentist but also the interpersonal skills and real-world ability to handle difficult situations under stress. With targeted practice and preparation you will be ready to use this opportunity to increase your chance of admission to medical or dental school.

Questions to Expect

The experience you have during a health professional school interview will vary from interview to interview. Below is a sample of questions by topic. This is not an exhaustive list but it will give you an idea of what to expect.

Open Ended

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your goals?
- There are hundreds if not thousands of applicants, why should we choose you?
- Why would you make a good doctor, dentist, vet, etc.?
- What things have you done to convince yourself that you will enjoy being a doctor, dentist, vet, etc.?
- How do you want me to remember you?

Medically-Related

- What are the pros and cons to our health-care system?
- If you had the power, what changes would you make to our health-care system?
- What is your opinion of HMOs and PPOs?
- Should doctors be allowed to 'pull the plug' on terminally ill patients?

Academics

- Why did you choose your present course of studies?
- Can you convince me that you can cope with the workload in medical school?
- Do you engage in self-directed learning?
- Tell me about your research.

Social Skills or Interests

- Give evidence that you relate well with others.
- Give an example of a leadership role you have assumed.
- Have you done any volunteer work?

Stress Management

- How do you handle stress?
- What was the most stressful event in your life? How did you handle it?
- The night before your final exam, your father has a heart-attack and is admitted to a hospital, what do you do?

Problem Situations

- A 68 year-old married woman has a newly discovered cancer. Her life expectancy is 6 months. How would you inform her?
- A 34 year-old man presents with AIDS and tells you, as his physician, that he does not want to tell his wife. What would you do?
- You are taking a final exam and notice there is a student cheating. What would you do?
- Have you been to other interviews?

Personality-Oriented

- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What do you do with your spare time?
- What is the most important event that has occurred to you in the last five years?
- If you had three magical wishes, what would they be?
- What would you do on a perfect day?
- What are your best attributes?
- What is your greatest fault?

Miscellaneous Questions

- Should the federal government reinstate the death penalty? Explain.
- What do you expect to be doing 10 years from now?
- Why do you want to attend our institution?
- What other schools have you applied to?
- Have you been to other interviews?

Concluding Questions

- What would you do if you were not accepted to a medical school?
- How do you think you did in this interview?
- Do you have any questions?

After the Interview

It is appropriate to write a thank you note to your interviewers. It can either be a short hand-written note or email, and should be sent immediately after the interview. Also write down your impressions of the school for future reference.

The timing and procedure of the final decision-making process vary greatly from school to school. You may hear within two weeks or not for a few months. You may send any significant additional material that strengthens your candidacy such as fall semester grades or new research publication or health related internship. Additionally, you may ask the interviewer when you might expect to hear a decision about your application.

Selecting a Medical School

Medical schools, like individuals, are very different. Selecting the “best” medical school for you can be challenging. The questions below are designed to help you evaluate the schools you visit. While this list is by no means complete, it can help serve as a base for your own questions. Be sure to research each school before your interview so you can ask informed questions. The interview can be one of the most valuable resources to help you decide on where to matriculate.

35 Questions I Wish I Had Asked

Adapted from [American Medical Schools and Colleges \(AAMC\)](#) worksheet.

Curriculum

1. Are there any special programs for which this medical school is noted?
2. Please tell me more about the integrated curriculum.
3. What modalities are used for student lectures?
4. What are the opportunities for research? What are the policies for taking time off for research opportunities?
5. How do students get assistance if an academic need arises?
6. Is there flexibility in the coursework (the number of electives) and the timing of the courses (accelerating, decelerating, and time off) during the pre-clinical and clinical years?
7. Are standardized tests used such as the NBME shelf exams?
8. Has this medical school, or any of its clinical departments, been on probation or had its accreditation revoked?
9. How do students from this medical school perform on the National Board Examinations? How does the school assist students who do not pass?

Evaluations

10. How are students evaluated academically? How are clinical evaluations performed?
11. Is there a formal mechanism in place for students to evaluate their professors and attending physicians? What changes have been made recently as a result of this feedback?

Counseling/Student Support

12. What kind of academic, personal, financial, and career counseling is available to students? Are these services also offered to their spouses and dependents/children?
13. Is there a mentor/advisor system? Who are the advisors--faculty members, other students, or both?
14. How diverse is the student body? Are there support services or organizations for ethnic/cultural minorities, LGBT students, and women?

Facilities

15. Tell me about the library and extracurricular facilities (i.e., housing and athletic/recreational facilities). Is designated study space available?
16. Are students required to have a laptop?

17. What type of clinical sites—ambulatory, private preceptors, private hospitals, and rural settings, international—are available or required for clerkships? Does this school allow for students to do rotations at other institutions or internationally?
18. Is a car necessary for clinical rotations? Is parking a problem?

Financial Aid

19. What is the current tuition and fees? Is this expected to increase yearly? If so, at what rate?
20. Are there stable levels of federal financial aid and substantial amounts of university/medical school endowment aid available to students?
21. Are there students who have an "unmet need" factor in their budget? If so, how do these students come up with the extra funds?
22. Are spouses and dependents/children covered in a student's budget?
23. Are there services/staff available to assist students with budgeting and financial planning?
24. Does this school provide guidance to its students and to its graduates/alumni, on debt management?

Student Involvement

25. What medical school committees (e.g., curriculum committee) have student representation?
26. Are students involved in (required or voluntary) community service?
27. How active is the student council/government? Are there other active student organizations?

Policies

28. What is the student medical insurance coverage and what is the cost to students?
29. Is there an established protocol for dealing with student exposure to infectious diseases?
30. Does this school provide, or does the student pay for, vaccinations against Hepatitis B or prophylactic AZT treatment in case of a needle-stick or accident?
31. Is disability insurance provided to cover exposure?
32. Is there a school honor code? Is there a grievance process/procedure? Are the students involved?

Residency

33. May I see a list of residency programs to which this school's recent graduates were accepted?

Questions to Ask Yourself

34. Does this school have strengths in the type of medicine (primary versus specialized care, urban versus rural practice environment, academic medicine versus private practice) that I will want to practice?
35. Would I be happy at this school for at least the next four years?