

THE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL INTERVIEW OVERVIEW

You should look forward to your interviews at professional schools as an opportunity for the admissions committee to come to know you and to understand your commitments and goals. Before the day of your interview, review both your standardized and the secondary application for that school. You should review the material the school has sent you, looked closely at their website, and be prepared to discuss why you are specifically interested in their program.

Each professional school will approach the interview process in different ways, but they will all generally be working to understand your strengths and weaknesses in the following areas:

- **Problem-solving skills.** Throughout your interview you will be asked questions which can help the committee understand the way in which you approach decision-making. They will be working to insure that you are careful in problem-solving, that you are attentive to detail, that you are able to be flexible, that you are tolerant of cultural differences, and that you can accept the right of someone to have an opinion that differs from your own. The questions asked in order to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your abilities will generally be quite innocent, such as "Tell me about your family." Or, "Why did you choose to attend the Johns Hopkins University?" When asked a question around a complex issue, do not simply answer "yes" or "no" but give the interviewer insight into how you have arrived at that decision.
- **Commitment to medicine /veterinary medicine/dentistry/etc.** You must convince the interviewer that you have made a mature, well-informed decision to pursue your chosen career. You must demonstrate an understanding of the demands and realities of a life in that profession and of your emotional, intellectual and physical ability to meet these challenges.
- **Interpersonal skills.** You must demonstrate throughout the interview day the interpersonal skills needed to be successful in the practice. Strong communication skills, awareness of the needs of others, and the compassion to respond to those needs must be evidenced.
- **Academic readiness.** The admissions committee will need to be assured that you will be successful in the schools curriculum. If there are questions which rise from your academic record, be prepared to answer them openly and honestly.

The decision to grant you an interview commits the resources of the professional school admissions process to you for the interview day and, of necessity, eliminates another candidate from the interview process. If you are offered an interview, take the first available appointment and make plans to keep this appointment. Canceling an interview or not showing up causes great problems for a professional school, for our future applicants to that school, and often for the HP adviser who then gets a phone call from that school's dean asking for help in assuring that our other applicants will appear for interviews. If an emergency arises, see the HP adviser immediately to discuss the issues and the appropriate response.

THE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL INTERVIEW MYTHS

Medical school applicants share misconceptions about the functions and nature of the medical school interview. Many applicants are convinced that their information was based on true stories which fully explained the success, or lack of success, of previous applicants. It is hoped that debunking some of these myths, in a spirit of fun, will reduce some of the anticipatory tension which surrounds preparation for the medical school interview.

MYTH #1: Only applicants dressed in black or navy blue suits and ties will be successful in gaining admission.

REALITY: It is important to dress appropriately, but it is certainly not necessary for everyone to arrive for the interview dressed in the same conservative uniform. I have wondered at times if there is a mail-order catalogue which is selling the medical school interview uniform to our nation's applicants. How is it possible for so many of them, men and women alike, to be dressed so similarly? Be yourself. I am NOT suggesting jeans, but there is nothing wrong with a red sweater and skirt or gray suit with a pink tie.

MYTH #2: Never bother others by taking a school up on its offer to stay with medical school students overnight.

REALITY: Students volunteer to host applicants because they are genuinely interested in sharing information about their school and community. These student hosts are not coerced into offering a space on their couch. This is a great way to gain insight into a medical school. Be pleasant and polite and full of thanks, but do not stay in a hotel when you have a chance to get an inside guide!

MYTH #3: During the interview day speak only when spoken to and never ask unsolicited questions.

REALITY: The interview day should be full of a series of conversations and opportunities to get to know some interesting people and for the school's representatives to get to know you. Enjoy the day and approach your interviews with an open and engaging attitude.

MYTH #4: Since the applicants are competing against each other, it is important not in any way to make the other applicants in the group feel more relaxed or comfortable.

REALITY: The successful applicants will be the individuals who are able to look beyond their own anxiety and reach out to make everyone in the group feel more relaxed and comfortable. The schools are looking for people who are confident enough to care about others.

MYTH #5: No one will ever really ask "why medicine as your career choice?"

REALITY: The answer to this question must be revealed in some way during the interview. If the response during the interview is "well, I don't really know," OR "I can't really put it into words," the committee response will be very clear: "NO!"

MYTH #6: One must be nice to the doctors and deans during the interview day but can "let you hair down" with the students and support staff.

REALITY: Committees can only assume that someone who is rude to secretaries and other students may respond to patients in the same manner. If you have to work so hard to be pleasant perhaps you could consider another career choice.

MYTH #7: During an interview never admit to having faced difficult experiences in life.

REALITY: Admission committees would much rather accept students who have learned from an experience of failure or frustration rather than someone who has yet to have this learning opportunity. Be straightforward about any difficulties and stress what you have learned from the experience which will ultimately make you a better physician.

MYTH #8: Never say "I don't know anything about that subject." Instead fake your way through a vague response and the interviewer will not notice.

REALITY: Just as a physician needs to say "I don't know" at times, so does a medical school applicant. Be honest about the limits of your knowledge, perhaps express an interest in researching the answer after the interview, but never simply pretend to know something about an issue. This approach will be discovered.

MYTH #9: If an interviewer asks inappropriate questions during an interview, it is important not to tell anyone at the school since this might hurt one's application.

REALITY: Committees are aware that even the most aggressive training programs for interviewers sometimes fail. If the school provides an 'end of the day' evaluation form, be honest and specific in discussing concerns. If no evaluation format is provided, appropriately share concerns with the Dean or Director of Admissions. Do not just pretend the inappropriate questions were not asked. The committee genuinely wants to get to know you and can best do this with a fair interview process.

MYTH #10: In preparation for the interview carefully practice "canned" answers for any possible questions.

REALITY: Remember the ideal interview is a *conversation*. There is nothing more frustrating for an interviewer than talking with a candidate who is simply responding to specific questions with general, rehearsed answers. Engage in the conversation and enjoy the opportunity to discuss your vision and goals.

Adapted from:

The University of Chicago Health Professions Handbook, The Office of the Dean of Students in the College. and Newsletter of the Central Association of Advisors for the Health Professions by Sylvia Robertson, Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid, Pritzker School of Medicine.