

## UNDERSTANDING THE MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEW

### Role of the Interview

- ❖ Interviews are conducted for screening and/or recruiting purposes.
- ❖ Some schools immediately screen out candidates who are ineligible because of their residency status.
- ❖ Many others do a first screening based on numerical criteria.
- ❖ Interviews help in assessing candidates' personal traits and characteristics beyond academic abilities.

### How Many?

- ❖ The most common number of interviews is two (e.g., Michigan State University), less often one (e.g., Wayne State University), least often three (e.g., University of Michigan).
- ❖ Candidates for the MD/PhD program generally receive several additional interviews with the relevant research departments.

### How Long?

- ❖ Some schools interview small numbers of applicants on several days during the week, while others tend to bring larger groups in on a single day.
- ❖ The latter model promotes a more elaborate and comprehensive interview day experience.
- ❖ Most institutions have a group orientation, a session on financial aid, campus tours and lunch with medical students.
- ❖ Students sometimes have an opportunity to attend classes if they make arrangements in advance.
- ❖ Some schools bring students in for two days (attend classes, visit university campus, etc.)
- ❖ Most interviews last about 30 minutes, although longer is much more common than shorter.

### When?

- ❖ Most interviews are concentrated in the period from September through April, although Early Decision Program (EDP) candidates usually interview in August and September.
- ❖ Many schools will attempt to accommodate requests from students to coordinate their interviews geographically.
- ❖ It is possible to reschedule interviews, if needed, as long as the request is presented professionally and with reasonable advanced notice.

### Who Is Interviewed?

- ❖ Most generally, only students who meet certain academic and extracurricular requirements are granted interviews.
- ❖ Some state schools are committed to interviewing all in-state residents; some interview all applicants from their own undergraduate college; some have specific agreements with feeder schools; some show preference for children of faculty, alumni/ae, or other special groups although some of these interviews are often for *counseling* rather than admission purposes.

### Who Conducts the Interviews?

- ❖ Virtually all schools use both their clinical and basic science faculty.
- ❖ Some schools *also* use medical students, administrators, alumni/ae, physicians and other members of the community, liberal arts faculty, etc.
- ❖ Occasionally, alumni/ae conduct regional interviews; but, if you can afford it, always go the actual campus.

### What Do Interviewers Know In Advance About the Candidates?

- ❖ Some interviewers have access to the entire application file, some just to the personal statements, others to everything but the academic credentials. When interviewers have limited access to a candidate's file, the interviews are referred to as "blind or semi-blind." You may wish to adjust your responses accordingly.

### Individual or Group?

- ❖ Most interviews are one-on-one, but some institutions (especially, Osteopathic and Canadian schools) prefer to have panel interviews. Panels usually consist of two or three interviewers.
- ❖ A handful of schools have panels of individuals simultaneously interview small groups of students. Adjust your preparation and delivery for group interviews accordingly.

### Problems at the Interview

- ❖ Occasionally, some illegal or inappropriate questions are asked; interviewers may be paged in the middle of interviews; interviewers may be terribly late for your interview; etc. Should anything out of the ordinary occur, immediately report the problem to the Admissions Office to see if an additional (alternate) interview may be scheduled the same day.
- ❖ Later notification of a problem or issue may still yield an offer for an additional interview in the near future; but prompt reports are usually easier and more effective on all parties involved.

### Categories for Interviewed Candidates

- ❖ Many schools notify candidates within two to four weeks after an interview, usually as soon as the Admission Committee convenes.
- ❖ The practice of waiting until February or March to accept most students on a special day after reviewing the entire applicant pool is becoming increasingly popular, especially on the east coast (e.g., Harvard, Cornell, UPenn, Columbia, Johns Hopkins and Pittsburgh).
- ❖ Most state schools do not oversubscribe the entering class at all while often highly regarded private institutions do so by 100% or more.
- ❖ Most allopathic schools follow AAMC traffic rules and require deposits of varying amounts to hold spots in the class. It is acceptable for applicants to hold multiple acceptances until May 15.
- ❖ Some private osteopathic schools require large non-refundable deposits (\$1000+).
- ❖ Waitlisted candidates are rank-ordered at some schools, but ranking is kept confidential.
- ❖ Some institutions welcome additional information from waitlisted candidates. If in doubt, ask!

## PREPARING FOR THE MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEW

### What You Will Be Assessed On

- *Physical bearing*: appearance, neatness, and confidence.
- *Communication skills*: ability to express ideas and opinions, verbal facility.
- *Personal characteristics*: friendliness and ability to relate.
- *Motivation*: derivation and strength of desire for a medical career.
- *Knowledge*: of self, medical profession and issues in the field.
- *Maturity*: commensurate to age, ability to handle responsibility, commitment, etc.
- *Interests*: activities, recreational, athletic, and research.
- *Concern index*: compassion, social service and empathy.
- *Emotional stability*: ability to relax, support system, etc.
- *Gut reaction*: overall impression, subjective feeling about the applicant.

### Scheduling

- Try to group interviews in the same geographical area if applicable.
- Always *ask* for format of interview (how many, with whom, blind, length, etc.)
- Go one day early and try to connect with medical students. Investigate housing options.
- Tour the medical school and hospital facilities.
- Make arrangements for sitting in a class in advance if you can.

### Preparation

- Conduct self-assessment and become familiar with typical medical school interview questions:
  1. Refer to sample questions further below
  2. See medical school interview feedback online from students interviewing nationwide at <http://www.studentdoctor.net/interview/index.asp>
  3. Look up The Career Center's own Interview Reports in the Reserve Collection, available at the Information Desk.
- Review your application materials (primary and secondary applications and transcripts).
- Think of more examples to quote during your interviews to support your statements.
- Practice, practice, practice:
  1. Practice with a friend or, if you prefer, rehearse on your own in front of a mirror—with a recorder if necessary

- Learn how to approach and discuss ethical and hypothetical questions—acknowledge that these are often complex matters with no absolute right and wrong answers; state the main ideas behind both positions on the argument at hand; don't be afraid to take a stand but do explain your rationale. *Refer to the related Career Center's handout for more tips and resources.*
- Read magazines and newspapers for current issues in the health field (i.e., *New Physician*)
- Look up school catalogs, bulletins, newsletters, and websites on the Internet to learn as much as you can about the school you are getting ready to visit. Minimally, become familiar with class size, curriculum, facilities, cost, teaching style, mission, philosophy, etc.
- Retrieve (or develop?) your list of criteria for school selection to help you generate a list of school-specific questions to ask your interviewer.
- Decide what you are going to wear and wear it for at least an hour prior to your first interview.

### **At the Interview**

- Give yourself plenty of time to get to the school.
- Be polite to anybody with whom you come in contact.
- Use your voice, hands and face to communicate.
- *Think* and, if necessary, *pause* before answering questions.
- Answer questions *briefly* but exhaustively.
- Be honest!
- Turn questions into opportunities to share a little more about you.
- Keep your cool with "difficult" questions.
- Ask your *own* questions!
- Get a timeline for a decision at the end of the interview.

### **After the Interview**

- If you feel any illegal or inappropriate questioning occurred, contact the Admissions Office immediately.
- Consider sending a thank-you letter or a professionally written e-mail to the Admissions Committee—usually better than a card.
- Write your impressions about the interview and the school as a whole when things are still fresh in your mind to reflect on and learn from this experience.
- Consider developing your own post-interview checklist to guide this and future interviews' reflection exercises.
- Adapt your preparation for the next interview based on what you learned.
- How did this school fulfill your selection criteria?

## **QUESTIONS THAT YOU MAY BE ASKED**

### **Family**

- Tell me about your family.
- Where did you grow up?
- Are there any physicians in your family? How have they influenced your decision to become a doctor?
- Did you ever feel any pressure to become a doctor? If yes, from whom?

### **Personal Background**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What three adjectives best illustrate who you are?
- If I asked your peers to describe you, what do you think they would say?
- How would your professors, internship supervisors and employers describe you?
- How would you define your learning style?
- What motivates you?
- How do you relax? What do you do in your spare time?
- How do you handle pressure?
- Provide an example of when you handled stress effectively.

- What was the most difficult decision you ever had to make?
- What is your biggest mistake/failure and what did you learn from it?
- What have been your most remarkable accomplishments?
- What do you consider to be your greatest asset?
- What is your greatest weakness? What have you done so far to try to improve in this area?
- Give me an example of how you have recently demonstrated your problem solving skills by resolving a difficult situation.
- What book/movie had the greatest impact on you in the past six months?
- If you were on the admissions committee, what type of student would you look for?
- Why do you think we should admit you to this school?
- What would you like to add to your personal statement?

### **Educational Background**

- Why did you choose to attend the University of Michigan?
- Why did you decide to be a \_\_\_\_\_ major?
- What was your favorite class in college?
- Why did you (or did not) get involved in research?
- If you could change anything in your academic career, what would you do differently?
- How do you feel your undergraduate education has prepared you for a career in medicine?
- Could you explain this very low grade in this class—if applicable?
- How did you prepare to take the MCAT?

### **Career Planning**

- Why are you interested in medicine?
- How do you know that medicine is a good career choice for you?
- Why have you selected medicine over other health care fields?
- What people/events/courses had the greatest influence on your decision to become a physician?
- What kind of internships, research projects, and volunteer experiences have you pursued to help confirm your career choice?
- What would you do if you were not accepted to medical school?
- Why did you apply to this school? What other schools did you apply to?
- What do you see yourself doing ten years from now, professionally, personally, etc.?
- Have you already identified any specialty interests?
- In what type of research are you interested in participating?
- What type of opportunities have you pursued to develop your leadership skills?

### **Health Care Environment**

- What is your perception of the relationship between physicians and the other members of the health care team?
- What do you think is the impact of insurance regulations, threats of malpractice, etc. on the medical profession?
- Do you see a shift from solo practices to clinics and group practices? Why/Why not?
- How do you think current discussions of health care reform are going to affect your future as a medical student and as a physician?
- To what extent do you think the government should get involved with health care? Why?
- To what extent do you think that technology is beneficial to medicine?
- In your opinion, what is the main cause for skyrocketing health care costs?

- What suggestions do you have for bringing health education programs to inner city communities?

### **Medicine as a Profession**

- How would you describe the "ideal" physician?
- What is your understanding of a typical day for a physician?
- What concerns do you have about becoming a physician?
- How do you think you are going to combine the demands of your personal life with a career in medicine?
- Do you think GPA and MCAT are adequate measures of a candidate's aptitude toward medicine? Why/Why not?
- How would you feel about working for a health maintenance organization?
- What role do you think physicians should play in the devising and implementation of a health care reform?
- Have you ever watched anyone die?
- Do you think that physician's pay is equitable?
- Do you think that medicine is a recession-proof career?
- Do you believe physicians are viewed with as much respect as they were in the past?
- What is your personal obligation to provide medical treatment to those in poverty-stricken areas?
- What do you think are important attributes physicians should have when working with children? And with older patients?
- Can you suggest ways to improve existing mechanisms to recruit underrepresented students into the medical field?

### **Hypothetical Situations**

- If you were sued for malpractice, how would you react?
- How would you calm down a patient who has been waiting for you for over two hours?
- What would you tell a 13-year old patient who came to you for a birth control prescription?
- If the U.S. were to adopt a socialized medicine system, how do you think this would affect the quality of health care?
- How do you think you would respond to a bleeding patient knowing he/she was HIV positive?
- How and when would you inform a patient that he/she had a terminal illness?
- What conversation would you have with a woman approaching you about getting an abortion?

### **Medical Ethics**

- Do you think that physicians should always tell the truth to their patients?
- How far should physicians go in an effort to help their patients?
- Under what circumstances would be legally or morally justifiable for a physician to breach patients' confidentiality?
- What responsibility do physicians have to intervene against (i.e., counteract) patients' questionable decisions regarding their care?
- Do you think euthanasia is morally, socially and legally acceptable?
- Who should decide when and why medical treatment should be withheld?
- What is a physician's ethical responsibility in helping a patient die?
- Under what circumstances is termination of pregnancy acceptable?
- What are the moral obligations of a physician to a patient's fetus?
- What ethical dilemmas do you associate with genetic screening, in-vitro fertilization and other forms of new reproductive technologies?
- Is it ethical to destroy embryonic blastocysts to harvest stem cells for research?

- How do you feel about using animals for research purposes?
- How should we protect human subjects in research studies?
- With the rise of HIV infection and other STD's, how do you think physicians should approach discussing sexual health and other safe sex practices with their patients, especially teenagers?
- Do you think hypnosis is an effective/legitimate form of medical treatment?
- What are your professional thoughts on breast implants/enlargements and other "cosmetic" types of medical interventions?
- Do you think it is ethical to offer monetary incentives to encourage people to donate organs?
- Do you feel it is acceptable to ration medical care?
- What responsibility do physicians have to contain the rising costs of health care?
- Can private organizations or the government contain these rising costs better?

## QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK!

- ❑ You should have an opportunity to ask your questions *at the end* of the interview. In general, it is a good idea to wait until then so that your interviewer can ask you all the questions that he/she has planned to fully evaluate you. This is especially true at schools with structured (vs. free-flowing) interviews.
- ❑ Review each school's literature to help you generate specific questions. Have your list of prepared questions in your portfolio—easy to retrieve if you need to. You may think of new, additional questions as you visit the campus on your interview day.
- ❑ Always ask open-ended questions vs. questions that would require a yes/no answer. Be prepared to clarify your questions as needed. *Avoid multi-part questions.* Keep your questions simple so they won't come across as too rehearsed.
- ❑ Always keep in mind who the target of your question is. That is: Ask the right people the right/appropriate question! Please note that some of the questions below could be asked of multiple interviewers.

### For Admission Officers

- ❑ In your view, what is the greatest strength of this school?
- ❑ How much flexibility is there in the coursework and in the timing of the courses?
- ❑ What's the attrition rate at this school? On what grounds have students left the school?
- ❑ How would you describe a typical entering class—backgrounds, age, etc?
- ❑ Have your programs for recruitment and retention of minority been successful—if applicable?
- ❑ What kind of special support services (academic, personal, etc.) are available to students?
- ❑ Which school committees have medical student representation?

### For Faculty Members

- ❑ I read your mission statement. What else can you tell me about the school's philosophy?
- ❑ What do you feel makes this institution unique? What do you consider to be the strengths of this program?
- ❑ What new projects or initiatives are in the works and what is driving the change?
- ❑ Which courses use PBL (problem-based learning) and how are they working out?
- ❑ What types of mentoring/advising systems exist at this school?
- ❑ What kinds of clinical opportunities are available during the pre-clinical years?
- ❑ What types of clinical sites are used for the clerkships?
- ❑ Can you describe the patient population that I will most likely have exposure to?
- ❑ What is the distribution of disease processes at these clinical sites?
- ❑ Where have your recent graduates gone, both geographically speaking and in terms of types of residencies?
- ❑ What kind of assistance will be available to me in identifying sites for residencies?
- ❑ How common is it to do rotations at other institutions or even internationally?
- ❑ How do you ensure that students obtain an adequate amount of clinical knowledge and skill prior to graduation?
- ❑ What impact has managed care, malpractice insurance, etc. had on this school?
- ❑ How does the school deal with students who are exposed to infectious diseases?

**For Medical Students**

- How would you describe the campus atmosphere?
- How safe is the campus environment? And the community at large?
- What types of voluntary or required community service initiatives are available?
- If you could improve something about this school, what area would you tackle first?
- What do you wish you had known prior to enrolling at this institution?
- Has any of your classmates left (transferred, dropped out...) and if so, for what reason?
- How can students evaluate the faculty?
- Can you give me an example of how responsive this school is to student feedback
- How integrated are computers into the curriculum?
- What is the schedule for tests? How does the school's grading policy affect learning?
- How and how often are students evaluated both in the pre-clinical and the clinical years?
- What is the call schedule on the third-year rotations?
- If I were to enroll here, what words of wisdom would you have for me to help me succeed?