

Virginia Commonwealth University

(adapted from the pre-health advising site at the University of Florida)

HEALTH PROFESSIONS INTERVIEWS - PROCEDURES AND SUGGESTIONS

Office of Pre-Health Sciences Advising

Homework before the Interview:

1. Describe your desire to enter the medical profession using as many verbs as possible.
2. Cite three key points that make you qualified to be a medical/dental/veterinary/optometry student. Don't over-generalize, by using such phrases as "I like to work with people." Clearly define points that make you the strongest possible candidate by using statements related to your volunteer or research experience for example, "I have spent 80 hours in the pediatrics ward of a small hospital and have a good idea of the demands of a hospital pediatrician."
3. Note three anecdotes that illustrate your abilities to enter this profession. Make sure the stories support the three key points cited earlier, describing skills you used to achieve a goal. Describe how you completed a volunteer experience, research project, or anything that conveys your skills and achievements.
4. List three questions you would ask the interviewer if given the opportunity. These could be general field-related inquiries or related to the school interviewing you, but they should reflect sincere interest in the profession or school. You could visit the AAMC's "31 Questions I Wish I Had Asked" at <http://www.aamc.org/stuapps/appinfo/31ques.htm> for ideas.
5. Visit the Career Center on the first floor of the Student Commons and schedule a mock interview. This will give you the chance to answer questions in an interview setting, have it recorded and critiqued by a third party. Do not memorize answers to questions. Rather, rehearse answering health-related questions so you are ready for ANY question.
6. The week before the interview, call to confirm that they are expecting you. Scheduling problems do occur.
7. Make sure you know where you are going, and how to get there. Plan to arrive early in case you get delayed. If you have a chance, try to find the meeting place the day before the interview so you do not get lost on the interview day.
8. Find out the format of the interview day. Sometimes this will be sent to you in the invite letter. Otherwise, you should call the admissions office and discuss how the day is structured. How many interviews will there be? Will they be one-on-one? Will there be a tour? Is breakfast or lunch served? Will you have the opportunity to meet with current medical students? What time will you be finished? The more you know about the day, the fewer surprises there will be and the more comfortable you will feel.
9. Talk to others who have interviewed at the school. What was it like? Were there any surprises they might not have anticipated? Log onto <http://interviewfeedback.com/> and read comments from other students who have interviewed at that particular school.
10. Read through the web site thoroughly. This could help generate questions you might have for the faculty/staff and students.
11. Read over your primary and secondary applications (you kept copies right?). Anything you listed on your application is a possible interview question. Be prepared to discuss anything and everything on your application.
12. Think critically about your strengths and weaknesses (in your academics, experiences, personality, social skills, etc). You should be able to recognize and discuss your strengths without sounding full of yourself. Conversely, you should be able to recognize your

weaknesses as areas that could use improvement, but do not deter from your qualifications.

What have you done to address your weaknesses?

13. Know some current issues facing health care today. You do not need to be an expert but you should be able to identify areas of concern for the health care industry. Read the newspaper, look at <http://www.medscape.com>, and ask the health care providers you are working with what they feel are the most pressing issues they deal with daily.
14. Exercise and eat well for at least a week before the interview. You will be mentally and physically alert and will deal better with stressful situations.

The Day of the Interview:

1. Dress appropriately. For men, the standard dress is a business suit or dress slacks and a blazer. Women should wear a dress or suit. The most appropriate color for the suit is medium to dark gray or navy blue. Don't forget to wear a conservative tie and socks that match the suit. There is no need to overdress (save the tuxedos and cocktail dresses for the "I've been accepted" party). Keep jewelry, body piercing, makeup, and cologne to a minimum. **When in doubt, less is best.** Shoes should be polished and all clothes should be well pressed. Women should wear a low pump heel because there could be a fair amount of walking. If you plan to wear panty hose, carry an extra pair in case you get a run. One in three job interviewers have stated that applicants were turned down for shoddy or inappropriate appearances. So take your attire seriously.
2. Be sure that your hands are clean and your fingernails are well scrubbed and/or manicured. Give the interviewer a firm handshake – not a broken hand.
3. Wait to sit until invited by the interviewer. Once seated, try not to pump your foot up and down when crossed.
4. Make sure to get your interviewer's name so that you may send them a thank you card.
5. If you have the opportunity to meet with current students, talk to them as much as possible. While the school is shopping for students, you are also shopping for schools and want to have enough information to make a good decision after you leave.
6. Pay attention to the school's facilities, the city, the students, community, housing, etc. Is this where you want to spend the next four years of your life?
7. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Do not look at your feet, the floor, or your hands. This may give the perception that you are less than confident about your talents.
8. Be very careful about your language. **THINK** before you answer. The interviewer wants to hear thoughtful answers. Focus on the question – don't be too wordy or talk around the subject at hand. You do not have to fill every minute of the interview with words. You are allowed to think in silence. Also, please be careful about repeating words or phrases; (i.e. "like," "hopefully," "you know," "interestingly enough"). "Like I said," is incorrect grammar; "as I said" is correct if you need to use the phrase.
9. Do not be afraid of saying, "I don't know." It is better than making up a meaningless answer.
10. Keep enthusiasm and energy level reasonably high throughout the interview process.
11. Be consistent. Think about earlier responses and rephrase them to elaborate information cited. Use examples to support your claims.
12. If asked about information on your application, use this as a time to expound on it, not just repeat it. Describe what you did, questions that you had while doing it, what you learned, etc.
13. You may be asked about ethical issues. Remember that ethical decisions are not your opinions. They are based on an ethical framework and may or may not be what you **THINK** should be done. Ethical decisions should be based on what is the right thing to do.

14. Relax. While this is certainly an important event, it is not a life or death situation. It is natural and healthy to be a little nervous. Be confident, not overly so, that you have made it thus far and have some strengths they are looking for.
15. Answer questions honestly. Do not try to be what they want. Your “persona” may be rejected. This will keep you from thinking afterwards if only I had been myself I probably would have a better chance of being offered admission.

After the Interview:

1. Before leaving, make sure you know what the remaining steps in the selection process. What is the timeline? When will you hear a decision? How does the alternate list work?
2. Thank you cards are not necessary, but recommended. A nice thank you card will be perceived well. If you decide to send thank you cards, remember to send them to each interviewer.
3. If a decision is not made for quite some time, you may wish to update the admissions office of new activities, new transcripts, etc. Significant events are worth noting but do not bother them with trivial experiences.
4. Take a moment to reflect on your interview experience, the negative and the positive, to learn from the process. What would you do differently? What would you keep the same? Maybe you were too fidgety. Maybe you rambled. Maybe you could have kept better eye contact. There’s nothing you can do about those things now, but you can certainly improve your next interview.
5. Visit interviewfeedback.com and record your experience.

WHAT ARE INTERVIEWERS LOOKING FOR?

- I. **Personableness**
 - A. How well can you openly talk about yourself with regard to other interests (hobbies, recreation, music, politics, etc.)?
 - B. How well can you openly talk about your family and its structure and fiber?

- II. **Maturity** (this quality will most likely be assessed after the full interview and answers to a few but pertinent questions)
 - A. What are the advantages that you see in pursuing medicine? (It is important to be specific, giving examples to illustrate your points.)
 - B. What are the disadvantages? (Again, it's important to be specific.)
 - C. What do you think will be some of the problems you will face? What do you know about dealing with such problems or issues?
 - D. Medicine is a social institution and changes as culture and society change. Therefore, what problems do you predict that medicine will face in the next decade?
 - E. How have you planned to finance your medical education?
 - F. Are you active in health related or other service organizations? How much time do you devote to such an effort?

- III. **Motivation** (This quality may be the determining factor in whether or not a candidate will withstand the rigors of medical school. Assessment of this quality is always difficult for the interviewer.)
 - A. When did you first decide that you wanted to pursue a medical career? Was there a specific cause for your decision? Has anything happened since that time to strengthen or weaken your decision? Can you see other careers in which you could achieve the same goals or meet the same personal needs?
 - B. What steps have you taken to learn more about medicine as a career?
 - C. If accepted to medical school, what field of medicine would you prefer? Where would you like to be practicing?
 - D. If not accepted to medical school, what will you do?

- IV. **Intellectual Curiosity** (this goes beyond the MCAT and GPA.)
 - A. How do you study? How do you manage your study time?
 - B. What courses do you find most enjoyable, most difficult? Why?
 - C. What do you do for relaxation?
 - D. What are your specific interests and hobbies?

- V. **Interpersonal Skills** (How well do you interact with your peers and with persons of different socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds?)
 - A. In what situations have you worked (or gone to school) with people who have different backgrounds?
 - B. What type of person do you enjoy being with? What type of person irritates you most?
 - C. Tell me about the happiest, most enjoyable period of your life. Tell me about the most difficult period of your life. How did you deal with this?
 - D. How do you deal with situations or persons that frustrate you?
 - E. What is it about yourself that you would most want the interviewer to know?