

Gwen M. Greene Career and Internship Center
Seniors, Grad Students and Alumni Steps to Success
Medical, Dental, Health Professions, and Public Health Interviews

Interviews are “conversations with a purpose,” not Q&A quizzes, nor interrogations. Always prepare for medical and graduate school interviews. If possible, meet with a counselor to prepare prior to any interview.

DO dress appropriately! This means a suit for men *and* women, unless otherwise specifically instructed by the interviewer. Ironed shirts or blouses, polished shoes, hose, blazers and appropriate attire project a professional “interview ready image.” Some on campus events are “business casual” or even “come as you are,” as will some portions of doctoral program interviews, but medical school interviews are definitely “interview formal.”

DO always check in advance regarding interview specifics. Send “confirmation and clarification” emails to whomever invited you to or is coordinating your interview. Confirm where and when you will be first meeting. Clarify the agenda and schedule if you wish, so you will not be surprised when your interview day arrives. Find out how many people you will be interviewing with, how long the entire process might take and, specifically ask, “are there questions I should think about or materials you recommend I read prior to my interview?” and “Will this be a blind interview, or will the interviewer have access to my application file and personal statement?” Via this email you can also uncover logistics, as well as interview techniques that may be involved. And, you can conduct appropriate pre-visit networking, especially for doctoral and graduate programs.

DON'T interview without researching! Find out as much as you can about the school and its mission statement, specific programs and areas of special interests, curriculum, faculty, and clinical settings. Be prepared to present yourself as the best possible candidate for that school. Most important, read your resume (CV), statements, transcripts, and all documents already submitted. These supporting materials are what generated the interview invitation and will likely generate interview questions. Email current students and faculty if possible. Effective research shows interviewers you can independently gather in depth information, that you are truly interested in this particular program, and provides you “focal points” upon which you can generate questions.

DO review typical interview questions. Most interviews will be “conversational,” when interviewers ask fairly typical questions. Some are “behavioral,” when interviewers query and probe about past achievements, seek details regarding behaviors (and skills), and when interviews ask candidates “what would you do in this situation” questions. For medical, nursing, veterinary, physician’s assistant, public health, and related programs you will be expected to know about “topical issues,” as well as “ethical standards and practices,” so do some cyber sleuthing.

DO follow up immediately with thank you emails and other supporting communiqués. Thank you notes can first be emailed and, if you wish, mailed after. Follow-up emails and, perhaps, conversations, even after an offer, must be sincere, focused and strategic. A counselor can assist you with follow-up correspondence.

DO bring copies of your resume and other documentation. Keep one for yourself in case interviewers refer to your resume specifically. Bring a copy of other documentation such unofficial transcripts, a writing sample, portfolio, or abstract of project findings. And, definitely, bring extra copies of resumes, statements, and admissions essays to share when appropriate. If you see your interviewer doesn’t have a resume, politely offer one. It’s better for you and for the interviewer if you both share that common reference point during discussions. If the interview is “closed” don’t be offended if they respectfully decline and continue without viewing your documents.

Use all resources available to help at each phase of graduate school application and interview processes. Career and Internship Center professionals are ready to coach you through this specific step and, by appointment, conduct role-play interviews. **Pre-interview Guide and Worksheets** that follow should be referenced and used prior to interviews. These will organize your thoughts and clearly identify what to highlight during your exchange.

Medical, Dental, Health Professions and Public Health Pre-Interview Guide and Worksheet

Soon, you will be conducting a medical, nursing, veterinary school interview, or one for a health professions graduate program. Read this document and complete the attached Worksheet. If you have any questions, contact the Career and Internship Center. In addition to individualized counseling, we offer specialized services, guidance and coaching, including role-play interviews, for students focusing on health care careers and related graduate study.

You may be asking yourself, “**What will they be looking for in an interview?**” The following are common aspects schools are interested in learning more about. Whenever possible, use examples from real experiences including volunteer, shadowing, research or work experience, particularly in a health care setting. Connect your experience to your understanding of medicine and be specific about observations of patients and healthcare professionals.

- Quality of reflection and self awareness
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Maturity
- Motivation for medicine
- Compassion for others
- Depth and breadth of knowledge and interests both in and outside of medicine
- Meaningful experiences
- Ability to cope with stress
- Social awareness and cultural competency
- Intellectual curiosity

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS AND STRATEGIES

Every school will have a different interview process. Although you will in almost all cases receive an agenda, you can contact schools in advance to inquire about specific type(s) of interview(s) and what to expect.

For medical school, some interviews are **Open “Informed,”** when the interviewer reviews candidate’s application materials, including transcripts, test scores, letters of recommendation and personal statements prior. The interviewer can decide which pieces, if any, to look over before your meeting. Therefore, an open interview may include basic questions like, “tell me about yourself” or specific and targeted (document inspired) questions like, “describe what you learned from your research on X”.

Closed File or “Blind” Interviews, are when the interviewer has no prior knowledge of your documentation and therefore your meeting will be a “first impression” exchange. Some schools have two interviews, one blind and the other informed. You may also encounter a **Partial Blind** interview, in which the interviewer has only seen part of your application. For example, the interviewer may read your essays but know nothing about your grades and MCAT score, or the reverse might be true. In a blind interview, it is important to introduce yourself from scratch and be prepared to answer the question, “tell me about yourself.” Be selective, yet detailed in what you present. You will also likely discuss your motivation to pursue medicine, which you may have addressed in the personal statement, but the interviewer has no prior knowledge of.

Informal Interviews will make you feel relaxed and comfortable and more like you are having a “get to know you” conversation rather than a prescribed set of targeted questions. Although this interview style can help you feel at-ease, remember that you are always being evaluated and you should always put your best self forward.

Pressure/Stress Interview, although rare, are conducted to evaluate how you act under pressure. The interviewer or interviewers will ask questions then probe deeply, perhaps making you uncomfortable in order to observe your response when stressed. The interviewer is more interested in how the applicant responds than what he or she says.

Panel Interview is a meeting with multiple interviewers at once. The panel may consist of a variety of faculty, physicians and researchers, admissions representatives and current medical students. Try to anticipate what questions each panelist might have and be prepared to speak to the likely interests of each.

Group Interviews involve several candidates interviewed at the same time, and may include one interviewer or a panel of interviewers. With other applicants in the room, often times candidates are asked to participate in a group exercise. Given time constraints, there is usually just time for one question apiece for each interviewer, which may not be the same for each interviewee. Group interviews are intended to gauge how well you interact with others. Remember to answer the question thoughtfully and concisely and not to “hog the airtime”. It is also encouraged to refer to others’ answers if you get the same question after them to show your ability to actively listen and your participation in the exercise.

Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI) has recently been adopted by several U.S. medical schools. It typically consists of six to ten timed stations through which applicants rotate. At each station, the applicant is presented with a question, scenario or task. The existence of numerous stations, each with a different interviewer, frees applicants from the worry of the med school interview consisting of interactions with only one or two individuals with whom they may not happen to “click.” In addition, it offers applicants the chance to demonstrate skills and qualities that are not always evident on a written application. Preparing for these interviews does not require knowledge of the exact questions being asked. Instead, an applicant should focus on developing his or her ability to formulate a logical, thorough response within a strict time frame. (from *The Multiple Mini-Interview for Medical School Admissions*, The Student Doctor Network, January 5, 2011). For a video example, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYZc-r1tyRw> as well as <http://careercenter.umich.edu/article/med/medical-school-interviews#MMIs>.

Standardized Patient (SP) Interviews: A standardized patient is an actor trained to portray a patient in a medical situation. Some schools use standardized patients as part of the interview process to determine whether students are comfortable in this type of setting. Typically, the candidate will walk into an “exam room” and be presented with a “case” from a particular patient. Often times, the scenario will involve issues involving medical ethics. The situation will not require medical knowledge, but will assess the candidate’s comfort level and interpersonal skills.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

There are a variety of question types you may be presented with in an interview. Be prepared to answer all. Attempting to memorize answers can do more harm than good, so, please use the following lists to stimulate thoughts and inspire you to share ideas effectively during interviews. Practice with a friend, family member or, most importantly, a Career Center counselor.

Frequently asked questions include:

- Why are you interested in Medicine/Veterinary Medicine, Public Health or *Insert Field*?
- What academic achievements are you most proud of?
- When did you decide you wanted to be a doctor/dentist or *Insert Title*?
- Why did you choose your major and how does it relate to your goals?
- What classes did you find most stimulating, and did they nurture your interest in medicine as a profession?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- If you do not get in to medical school, dental school, public health program or *Insert Field*, what will you do?
- How would you describe yourself and how would others describe you?
- What are your three most significant employment or co-curricular achievements?
- What clinical experience have you had and what did you learn within each?
- What are your long-term career/academic/research goals?
- Where do you see yourself in ten years?
- Why do you want to go here?
- How have your academic experiences prepared you for a career, and what are your future academic goals?
- What would you do differently with regards to academic, co-curricular, and practical experiences?
- What was your most difficult decision to date, and how did you go about making it?
- What research projects have you found most rewarding, and why?
- What do you think it takes to succeed in medical, dental school, or *Insert Field* school?
- What lessons have you learned from your “failures” or “mistakes”?
- Are your grades fair reflections of your academic abilities and intellectual potential?
- What concerns do you have with regard to a career in medicine, health care, or public health?
- What does your personal statement reveal about you and why did you write about what you wrote about?
- How will you bring diversity to this campus?

The **“Behavioral Interview”** allows interviewers to “quantify” and “objectify” a traditionally subjective process. It is based upon principles: that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior; more recent behavior is the best predictor of future behavior; and trends in behavior are better predictors than isolated incidents. Therefore, the interviewer will present “what did you do when” scenarios or ask you to identify past incidents when you used certain behaviors to achieve a task or reach a goal. Prior, interviewers have determined desired behaviors so they will use a pre-established “checklist” to determine if you have qualities associated with those required to succeed in graduate school. **Behavioral Questions include:**

- ❑ Describe when you faced problems that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- ❑ Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- ❑ Tell me about when you used communication skills in order to get an important point across.
- ❑ Give me an example of when you felt you were able to motivate others.
- ❑ Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully, empathetically, and patiently with another person, even when the individual may not have personally liked you.

Ethical and Hypothetical Situation Questions regarding issues surrounding bioethics, healthcare reform and the Affordable Care Act, breaking bad or sensitive news, end-of-life scenarios, dealing with under-age patients, and how to address crises are often included in medical as well as doctoral and related graduate program interviews. **Questions might include:**

- ❑ What are your views on terminating pregnancies, on stem-cell research and on physician assisted life termination?
- ❑ How would you feel about treating a patient infected with HIV?
- ❑ What do you think about the structure of health insurance and “universal healthcare?” What do you think the role of the government should be in health care?
- ❑ Have you been following the current health care debate? Where do you stand?
- ❑ You are treating a terminally ill patient being kept alive by life support. You feel that he should be taken off the machines. What do you do?
- ❑ A pregnant teenager wants to discuss options. She hasn’t told her parents about her pregnancy. What do you do?
- ❑ You have a strong opinion on a public health topic, yet you are asked to generate data and a report that would be counter. What do you do?
- ❑ What’s the biggest problem facing medicine today?
- ❑ Do you think health care is a right or a privilege?
- ❑ What challenges do you see associated with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act?
- ❑ How do you feel about socialized medicine? The Canadian and British Health systems? Germany and Switzerland?
- ❑ Do you know what an HMO is? a PPO?
- ❑ How do you see the field of medicine changing in the next ten years? How do you see yourself fitting into those changes?
- ❑ How do you feel about research performed on animals?

Questions to ask: You should come prepared with several questions to ask the interviewers, to help you get to know the medical or health professions graduate program better. These may include:

- ❑ What type of person would most likely succeed at this school, and why?
- ❑ What should I expect of myself over the first few days, weeks and months as a first-year student?
- ❑ How will my performance be judged, and by whom?
- ❑ What obstacles should I avoid my first weeks or months and how can I enhance my potential to succeed?
- ❑ What advice would you give a student just starting the program?
- ❑ What quality or asset of this program is most likely “hidden,” but should be more evident?

INTERVIEW RESOURCES

- ❑ American Public Health Association (APHA): www.apha.org
- ❑ Health Reform, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation: <http://kff.org/health-reform/>
- ❑ The American Journal of Medicine: <http://www.amjmed.com/>
- ❑ The Journal of the American Dental Association: <http://jada.ada.org/>
- ❑ Aspiring Docs, through the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC): <https://www.aamc.org/students/aspiring/basics/280914/interview.html>
- ❑ Gwen M. Greene Career and Internship Center: <http://www.rochester.edu/careercenter/students/interviewing/>

Medical, Dental, Health Professions and Public Health Pre-interview Worksheet

3 PROGRAM QUALITIES

Note 3 qualities of the particular program you will be interviewing for.

Review program's website in detail, and then briefly summarize "general" as well as "unique qualities" of the academic, clinical, cultural, or geographic offerings. What skills as well as attitudes would be required to succeed here? The more clearly and concisely you describe a program's characteristics and offerings, the better.

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3 QUALIFICATION CONNECTIONS

Focusing on the program, cite 3 key points that make you qualified for admissions.

Review your resume as well as essays and responses to questions posed in the application process. Then identify three key points to focus on during your interview. Identify courses, projects or volunteer experiences, and reveal academic, intellectual, practical and "motivational" qualifications to excel as a student and, ultimately, a health care and public health professional. "Connections" are qualities you possess and expressed, or achievements matching program qualifications. Simply, you are completing the statement "Thinking about what it would take to succeed as a student here, my three key assets are . . ." or "Thinking about becoming a practitioner, three key points I want to raise during this discussion are . . ."

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3 STAR (Situation, Tasks, Actions and Results) EXAMPLES

Note 3 anecdotes that illustrate your capabilities to STAR as a medical student.

Stories support the three Qualifications Connections, linking skills used to take goal directed actions and, ultimately to achieve results or finish a project. First, broadly describe the situation. Then, identify specific task, actions, and results associated with your accomplishments. Be prepared to cite by example, tell anecdotes and describe past behaviors that predict future performance potential.

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3 INTERVIEWER QUESTIONS

List 3 questions you would like to ask the interviewer.

Ask one question in the first 5 minutes of the interview in order to use response as the discussion progresses. Prepare a list of additional questions to ask during and at the end of the interview session. And do make an "affirmation" regarding our desire to be admitted at the very end, and then say "thank you."

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