

The Road to Medical School by Marion-Anna Protano

Medicine is not a job or a career, but a lifestyle one chooses. Compared to most other careers, admittance into medical school requires planning and years of preparation. However, there is no set formula of what you should do to guarantee admittance. Each individual finds their own path. What follows are some of the key things I learned on my own journey.

Do not be afraid to major in something outside of the sciences. Medical schools no longer require you to be a Biology major. Majoring in a non-science field can make you stand out. However, if you choose this path, I advise taking a couple extra upper-level classes in the sciences, like Biochemistry. But if you love the sciences and want to major in Biology, you should follow your heart. Ultimately, the key is to major in something you love and are interested in — and that you will do well in. Schools may not care what you major in but they do want to see success in school.

Get involved in things you love, outside of medicine. It is healthy and important to keep a balanced life. It is equally as important to show medical schools that you have carefully thought out your decision to apply and have had some exposure. Possible choices include research, shadowing a doctor, volunteering in a medical setting, or becoming an emergency medical technician. Talk to medical students, residents, doctors — everyone has advice based on their own experiences. Another smart option is to get involved in a medical school that you plan to apply to before the application process. A foot in the door may go a long way.

Take the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) seriously. A school will not take you if you are a fabulous candidate with a 20 on your MCAT. If you want to apply straight out of college, take the MCAT by April of your junior year so you have time the following summer to apply, and if need be, take it again. Take a preparatory course for the MCAT and do a lot of work outside it. Do not impose a lot of other obligations during the time that you are studying for the exam.

Apply early. Not only will schools get your applications sooner, but you will not have to worry about applications while you are in school or working in September. Most students apply to approximately 15 schools; it's a lot of money, but you want to increase your odds. Use the Medical School Admissions Requirement (MSAR; available for purchase on-line) to help you choose schools. The MSAR is the official guide, filled with information about the school and its previous applicants. The winter prior to the application process, you can mail the admissions office for catalogs of the schools. The decision to choose where to apply to is personal; you have to decide what your priorities are, such as geography or curriculum. The key is to find schools that best match what you want and your numbers (your MCAT scores and GPA).

Be prepared for the interviews, but also be yourself. The Medical School Interview Feedback site (<http://www.studentdoctor.net/interview/index.asp>) is extremely helpful. Read articles about current medical advances, do practice interviews, and practice questions by yourself. Each interview will probably be as different as each interviewer you will face.

Most importantly, never give up. I truly believe that where there's a will, there's a way. And enjoy the journey.

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