



DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

**Career  
Services**

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## Medical School Interviews

As you prepare for your interviews, keep in mind that medical schools want to learn more about you as a person, and to gain information that will supplement the facts they have learned from your application. Interviewers want to learn, for example, the origin of your interest in health care, the field of health care that most interests you, the depth of your commitment, and your interests beyond academics. They will be observing how you communicate your enthusiasm and how you express your ideas.

Most interviewers are genuinely concerned that they identify the best candidates for their medical school. Very few students have reported “stress” interview tactics, but an individual instance may occur. If an interviewer asks you a question that you think moves beyond the limits of acceptability, you are perfectly within your rights to politely refuse to answer the question.

On the following pages you will find sample questions commonly asked in interviews. Do not memorize answers to the sample questions but instead consider what points you might make if you are asked similar questions. Interviewers will want to know about what interests you in their school. In addition, interviewers may ask questions about medical issues or about ethical dilemmas related to medicine. Be prepared to discuss issues facing the health care delivery system. Do some research before your interviews. Visit the Career Services Resource Library.

Below are some suggestions that will help you prepare for the interview. These are all factors that you can control; have them well in hand so that you feel confident and can concentrate during the interview on those factors that the interviewer is controlling.

1. Do your homework. Learn as much as you can about the medical school, its philosophy and programs. To help you in your research, located in the Career Services Resource Library is the current edition of the AAMC’s *Medical School Admission Requirements* and completed questionnaires from Dartmouth alumni/ae who are currently attending medical school.
2. Know where the interview will take place and arrive early so that you can relax and gather your thoughts before you begin. Conservative attire is appropriate.
3. Remember the importance of “body language”. Begin by projecting an impression of ease and self-confidence. This image will last throughout the interview. Look the interviewer in the eye, sit up straight, lean forward a little, avoid nervous gestures, smile, and demonstrate enthusiasm.
4. Listen to the questions that are asked, answer them concisely, honestly and briefly. Be sure you are answering what is asked. If you don’t know the answer, say so. Don’t be evasive. Don’t hesitate to be honest and frank, even if your answer may not always put you in the most favorable light. A certain amount of candor will make your entire conversation more believable. Discuss your accomplishments. Try not to editorialize; let the interviewer draw his/her own conclusions from the facts you provided. Don’t bluff—you will be caught.
5. Point out the positive gains from your past experiences. Believe in yourself. If you project your experiences as worthwhile, the interviewer will be left with that impression.

6. Humor is ok, don't be afraid to be human.
7. Be yourself. Know your strengths and your accomplishments and be comfortable with who you are. Relax enough to allow your unique personality to emerge in a natural conversation.

## **Sample Questions**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why medicine? Why do you want to be a physician? When did you first decide you wanted to pursue medicine?
- Why have you applied to this institution?
- What can you tell me about yourself that doesn't show on your transcript?
- Why do you think you're especially suited for medicine?
- What qualities do you value most in a physician?
- What is your impression of your four years at Dartmouth?
- How do you personally handle stress?
- Why did you choose your major?
- You've done some interesting research with Professor A. Describe it briefly.
- If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be?
- What are you most proud of?
- Tell me more about what you wrote about in your personal statement.
- Why were your first-year grades so bad?
- Tell me about your research.
- What did you learn in [name of course]?
- How has working as a [name of job] made you a better candidate for medical school?
- What volunteer work contributed to your commitment to become a doctor?
- What is the greatest problem facing medicine today?
- How would you organize health care in an ideal world?

## **Suggestions From Dartmouth Alumni/ae**

- Try to schedule interviews at less desirable schools first.
- Read the catalogs and review the web sites before your interviews. Know why each school is attractive to you.
- Relax. Stress interviews are myth.
- Get plenty of sleep; do not try to prepare beyond obvious thinking.
- Arrive early and be patient. Bring a book to read while you wait.
- Come well dressed.
- Relax. 90% of the interviews are totally casual, shoot the breeze sessions. Know what the current issues are and use them in your replies.
- Honesty and casual open-mindedness are appealing as well as revealing.
- You must show confidence. Be honest and sincere. Stay calm.
- Don't be afraid to say "I'm not sure" when you aren't.
- Be prepared to ask significant questions, not the kind that you could find the answer to in the catalog. Have plenty of questions ready for the end of the interview – maybe a question you could ask everywhere for a common denominator.

## Feedback from Former Applicants

“I was asked about my AMCAS essay.”

“Be careful with credit cards. I have spent about \$300 per interview and I’ve had six interviews so far. Be strategic about how you schedule your interviews and buy your tickets a few weeks in advance. Use cheaper airports and airlines.”

“I have had a few interviews so far and could give a little advice. ALWAYS be prepared for why do you want to be a doctor? I know some people were never asked but I was asked at three out of three interviews so far. Also, I have had clinicians for all three so they aren't really involved with the medical school until the third and fourth year. Have questions ready to address someone who won't be able to answer questions about the first two years. Also, other students being interviewed can be good resources. You can talk to them about what the interview was like if they interviewed before you.”

“I’ve already had one interview so far and that was at Washington University. Their interviews are blind and very, very laid back. It's basically chatting about yourself and asking questions about their school. I also found out about a website called [www.studentdoctor.net](http://www.studentdoctor.net) where interviewees fill out surveys describing their interviews. It's really useful.”

“Everyone was dressed very formally: business suits for everyone! The day started at 12:00 with an informal lunch with all the interviewees (16) for that day. After lunch, the admissions representative came in to tell us about the school. At 1:00 we were taken out to go through two half hour interviews: one with a student and the other with a professor. Both were blind interviews. The first question of course was why do you want to be a doctor. Then the conversation just continues in any direction that you or the interviewer chooses. Very enjoyable actually. I didn't prepare at all and I think I did just fine. However, I'm not saying that all the other interviews will be this easy. I have four more in October and I do plan to prepare for those by reading up on current events, especially in hot health topics, and about their school.”

“Stony Brook: the professor had my AMCAS application with him and we just basically went through it together. He asked me questions about each item I listed. Then we somehow got into a conversation about literature. Quite relaxed. Didn't give me time to ask questions about the school at the end. He told me to ask the students who were giving the tour. Vanderbilt: a 50 minute interview, 10 minutes of which were spent discussing me and the other 40 of which the interviewer (faculty) spent telling me about the school. I hear this is the norm there. Einstein: took place in the interviewer's office. Actually asked me what made me decide to want to become a doctor. Suits are standard for men. Haven't seen anyone in a 3-piece yet, though. Women dress conservatively, as well. All interviews have provided a tour and lunch, as well as a chance to speak with students. What do I wish I had done differently? I guess the only thing is that I wrote the same essays for so many different applications that I know them so well that I tend to repeat them word-for-word. I don't think this went over well with the Einstein interviewer. It's hard to break the habit if they ask you a question that's basically right off your application, though. I guess I would try to make things sound a little less canned.”

“Ok. It seems that everyone wears the same thing like it's out of a catalog. Dark suits and dark skirts are most appropriate. I believe that is what they want as it is a rather conservative profession still.”

“At my interview, they gave us an orientation, tours and we talked to 2nd year students first. This was to give us a feeling of the school and get us comfortable. Afterwards, in the interview, they also try to make you feel comfortable. If you play it off like a conversation it is really not that hard. I think it went well so I would not change anything, but of course that is tentative on the fact that I do not know what they thought about it yet.”

## Helpful Resources

### **Check out the Nathan Smith Society Alumni Network and the Open Forums**

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nss>

### **Medical School Programs**

<http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/programs/start.htm>

### **Comments from Medical School Candidates**

<http://studentdoctor.net>

### **Travel Information**

<http://www.travelocity.com>

<http://www.expedia.com>

<http://www.priceline.com>

<http://www.cheaptickets.com>

<http://www.jetblue.com>

<http://www.ata.com>

<http://www.usairways.com>

<http://www.southwest.com>

# Health Professions Advising Issues

## Effective Communication Skills and the Medical/Dental School Interview

**Barry S. Anton, PhD**  
**University of Puget Sound**

Sylvia Robertson, the Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid at the University of Chicago, Pritzker School of Medicine, gave a stirring presentation on "Effective Communication Skills and the Medical/Dental School interview."

Dean Robertson made several important comments about the interview process that students should be aware of:

- Appreciate that each interview costs the professional school around \$300 to give.
- Appreciate the importance and function of the interview.
- Strengthen your position to enter the interview as a confident and personally effective candidate.
- Be aware that your goal is to have a "conversation" with the interviewer. The interviewer must "qualify" you before the conversation can occur.

Dean Robertson reviewed some of the non-cognitive factors that interviewers are aware of:

- Appropriate eye contact
- Appropriate grooming to enter a conservative profession
- Prompt arrival/rescheduling
- Managing appointments once you are at the interview
- Appropriate FIRM handshake
- Appropriate greeting
- Appropriate control of emotions

- Appropriate use of humor and smiling
- Appropriate demonstration of interest in others
- The candidate should not be self-absorbed, even if they think they need to "tell their story."
- The candidate's body language, voice, and attitude is positive.
- Appropriately inspires trust and confidence

- Adequate communication skills:\*
  - Appropriate use of humor and smiling
  - The candidate tells the truth by not embellishing their record.
  - New information is valued more than what can be gleaned from the candidate's AMCAS application.
  - The candidate says enough, but not too much, while listening carefully for multi-part questions (good listening skills).
  - The candidate stays on topic.
  - The candidate's message is clear.
  - The candidate is polite

\* Adapted from: Schwartz, N. & McKinley, L. *Strategies for Language Disordered Adolescents*. Thinking Publications. Eau Claire, WI 1993.

Dean Robertson then reviewed a series of checklists that candidates could use to help them through the interview process:

### **Pre-Interview Day Checklist**

#### *Time Away Arrangements*

- Book travel reservations ASAP
- Issue of Interviews in same or close by city
- Make sure to arrange airport transfers to/from interview.
- Overnight arrangements – Use host accommodations whenever possible

#### *Interview wardrobe*

- Make sure an iron is available at site; if not pack one.
- Diet, exercise, rest
- Local newspaper—informed citizen concept
- Be determined to be centered and enjoy the experience.

#### *Interview Materials*

- Snacks
- Water
- 3 copies of application/resume
- Questions to ask interviewers
- Book to read during down time
- Self-talk to remain centered psychologically

### **Day of Interview Checklist**

- Extra time to get ready
- Have healthy breakfast
- Travel arrangements – If at all possible, arrive at interview site early to scope out
- Arrive 15 minutes early
- Check appearance
- Do relaxation exercise
- Mentally rehearse your pleasant, enthusiastic greeting.
- Participate fully
- Address people by name, using titles as appropriate
- Focus on the needs of others
- Thank people for their time

### **Post Interview Checklist**

- Record all impressions, questions answered and questions remaining to be asked of you
- Debrief with friends, family, and your advisor
- What did you learn from the interview that will help you improve your next interview?
- Send personal thank you note to people who interviewed you. NEVER send email thanks.
- Update tracking chart.

Dean Robertson recommended the following book for candidates to review before attending an interview: Gottesman, D. & Mauro, B. (1999), *The Interview Rehearsal Book - 7 Steps to Job Winning Interviews Using Acting Skills You Never Knew You Had*.