



## **If You're Considering Being Pre-Med . . .**

If you're considering a career in medicine or other health profession, you should be aware of which factors will and which won't increase your admissibility. Having excellent grades and being at the top of your college class is what will help you the most, much more than attending a prestigious college. So if you hope to go to medical school one day, you might be wise to forgo the "reach" schools on your list and opt instead for someplace where you will be able to stand out.

Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to compare medical school admission rates from various colleges because schools often protect those statistics by limiting whose applications they will officially endorse. That is to say, the pre-med advisor may write letters of recommendation only for students from the top 15% of the class. Those with somewhat lower grades may apply with letters of recommendation from other professors, but their chances of being admitted without the pre-med advisor's endorsement are diminished. So, when investigating colleges, students considering a career in medicine should inquire whether the pre-med advisor writes letters for everyone applying or only for those from the top of the class.

What students do outside of class during their college years is also extremely important to medical school admissions committees, who look for evidence that a candidate really understands the field and has the personality and values necessary for success. Consequently, significant experience volunteering in a clinical setting and engaging in scientific research are recommended. Students can shadow doctors and volunteer in local hospitals, and many colleges also have break programs that take students to other countries to assist in medical missions. If a college has a medical school and hospital near its campus, the opportunities for students to engage in mentored research are increased, but even at schools that don't, there may be plenty of opportunities for students to work with faculty in the school's own laboratories. Needless to say, opportunities for all of the above are worth investigating when you are deciding where to go to college.

Reflecting changes in thinking about what it takes to be a successful physician, the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) underwent a significant revision in 2015. Because of an explosion of scientific knowledge, a greater emphasis is now placed on biochemistry, and because of a growing conviction that physicians need a broad understanding of people as well as of science, psychology and sociology have been

added to the test. To be prepared for the MCAT, students are expected to take two college courses in social or behavior sciences and humanities. Most health profession schools also require two semesters of English and one or two of math as well as four or five in chemistry, two in biology and two in physics.

The most popular undergraduate majors for pre-med students are still in the biological sciences, but majoring in the humanities or social sciences is not only possible, but may even be advantageous in the admissions process.

Founded on the belief that non-science majors will bring a more humanistic approach to the practice of medicine, New York City's Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai some years ago developed an early assurance program for such students who apply during their sophomore year of college. Now called the Donald and Vera Blinken FlexMed Program, it frees this select group of students from both the MCAT requirement and some background science courses, using their SAT or ACT scores instead and enabling them to study the sciences at Mount Sinai during a five-week term prior to the beginning of medical school. A wonderful opportunity for pre-med students with strong interests outside of the sciences, it is highly selective. For more information on this program, see <http://icahn.mssm.edu/education/medical/md-program/flexmed>.

Other special opportunities top students should be aware of are combined BS/MD programs and early assurance programs that some medical schools have in conjunction with specific undergraduate colleges. The most competitive are the BS/MD programs whereby medical schools offer admission to a small number of applicants based exclusively on their high school records. The main advantages these programs confer are the opportunity to enjoy the college years without worrying about getting into medical school later, and in some (but not all) cases, the opportunity to avoid taking the MCAT. Even those schools that do require their BS/MD students to take the MCAT generally require a lower score to stay in the program than would be needed to enter later on. Also, a number of these programs enable students to complete college and medical school in a total of seven instead of eight years by shortening the undergraduate experience. Of course, saving a year can translate into a significant financial saving.

The students who are admitted to medical school based solely on their high school record have mostly scored in the 700s in each section of the SAT as well as in subject tests in math and biology or chemistry. The majority of them have also demonstrated leadership, shadowed a doctor, and engaged in real science research as well as substantial and meaningful volunteer work. A must-read for anyone potentially interested in pursuing this combined degree is Todd A. Johnson's book entitled *BS/MD Programs - The Complete Guide: Getting into Medical School from High School* published by College Admissions Partners. In it Johnson gives detailed information about each one of these programs as well as information applicable to all of them.

An appealing alternative for students at some undergraduate institutions is the opportunity to gain a guarantee of admission to a particular medical school during their sophomore year of college, thereby eliminating much of the anxiety engendered by the usual application process. For instance, qualified sophomores at Tufts, Brandeis, Boston College, College of the Holy Cross and Northeastern may be granted such early assurance of admission to Tufts University School of Medicine, and qualified students at Rutgers may be granted early assurance of admission to both Rutgers - New Jersey Medical School in Newark and Rutgers- Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick. A good way to learn more about early assurance as well as seven and eight year combined programs is from this website: [http://www.minimedicalschool.com/BA\\_MD\\_programs.html](http://www.minimedicalschool.com/BA_MD_programs.html)