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### **Advice to High School Students**

*The doctor is a person who has been trained to think, to observe critically, and to realize that a human being is not a conglomeration of integrated complex systems, but an individual with a personality of his own.*

**William A. R. Thomson**

#### **❖ High school is a good place to start.**

Your medical education truly begins in high school. Many students don't arrive at their career of decisions until after arriving at college. This can give you a unique advantage in the process of getting into medical school. By taking the right classes now, you can prepare yourself well for the basic requirements you'll need to take as an undergraduate.

First, if you have the opportunity to take AP courses in the sciences, do so. This is more for getting an intensive study regimen and less for getting advanced college credit. Typically, AP classes are taught more like college courses. The effort you put into these classes will pay dividends later. It's up to you to decide whether or not you actually want to take the AP test, but it is advisable to go ahead and take the courses again in college rather than just settle for AP credit. Advanced courses in chemistry, physics, and biology are very useful.

If your high school doesn't offer many AP courses, you might work out an arrangement to take community college courses in chemistry, physics, biology, and perhaps calculus in lieu of the courses your high school offers. If there are no AP courses at your high school and no community college to close to your high school, it might be worth your time and money to go to the nearest college bookstore or to an online bookstore and buy college level textbooks in these basic sciences to subsidize your high school text. By familiarizing yourself with the way college texts are written and the information they contain, you will have an advantage over your fellow students in college. This can be especially important at larger Universities where students often have more trouble contacting professors for personal attention and where your grade hinges upon the scores you get relative to a grading curve.

#### **❖ How do I select a college?**

There are many factors affecting one's choice of college. Cost, quality of the program in your major, class size, and location are just a few things to consider. Truly, the quality of your education depends more on what you put into it. When medical schools look at students, they might look at what school you went to, but more importantly, they will look at your performance. If you have scored well at a smaller, lesser-known institution, the school shouldn't make a difference. As long as you have the basic requirements, you can choose any major. English, music, history, art, and engineering are just a few of the majors people choose as a pre-med course of study. Because these majors are not seen as often, and since many medical schools strive to put together as diverse a class as possible, these majors can really stand out from the pack.

#### **❖ What about volunteer work?**

One way you can make yourself stand out from the crowd is in your choice of volunteer work. It can be difficult to get into medical school if you have no volunteer work under your belt. Your choice of organizations that you volunteer for can say a lot about you as an individual.

Foremost, choose volunteer organizations that appeal to you. Don't choose organizations that you think they will like to see. If you love what you're doing, it will be reflected in what you say about it on your application and during interviews.

A good choice for pre-med students is volunteering in hospitals. This will give you an early exposure to the doctor-patient relationship, the daily routines of healthcare workers, and help you learn about some of the tools of modern medicine. It will also show an interest in helping humanity, always a good image to put forth to an admissions board. Almost every major hospital has a volunteer department and even small hospitals would likely welcome the help. Call around to local hospitals and see if they have available positions.

If your career interests include research, try to get into a research lab. Many professors are looking for undergraduate volunteers to do work in their labs. Most of the time you can also get course credit for the work you do.

These are thousands of different ways to volunteer. Finding the ones that suit you best is up to you. In the end, if you show that you have an interest in helping others though, you will greatly improve your chances of acceptance to medical school.

### ❖ **Know your resources!**

Students interested in medicine are encouraged to research the wide variety of jobs available in the health professions, to discuss the nature and demands of medicine with a pre-medical advisor or health professional, and to ask a lot of questions before embarking on the application process. Be sure to speak with the financial aid officers at your school about concerns of financing your medical education.

### ❖ **Know the school's admission requirements**

In general, however, most medical schools will expect applicants to have attempted the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), and to have completed the following types of courses:

One year of BIOLOGY

One year of PHYSICS

One year of ENGLISH

One year of GENERAL CHEMISTRY

One year of ORGANIC CHEMISTRY

One year of BIOCHEMISTRY (at many schools)

### ❖ **What exactly is the MCAT?**

The MCAT is a 1-day test that includes three multiple-choice sections and two essays. It is taken by all students applying to United States and Canadian medical schools, as well as by many applying to osteopathic and chiropractic schools. The exam is given only in the United States and Canada, once in April and once in August.

If you're planning to apply to medical schools during your senior year, take the MCAT in either April or August of your junior year, the year before you apply to medical school. Take it in April, and you'll have time—Heaven forbid!—to take it again in August if you don't do so well the first time. The advantage of the August date is that it could give you a school-free summer in which to focus solely on preparing for the MCAT.

### ❖ **Other helpful hints**

1. Seek a mentor in college who can help you with your academic journey.
2. Try to take no more than two sciences during your 1<sup>st</sup> semester.
3. Do not pledge into fraternities/sororities within your first year of college!
4. Seek help from others who are where you would like to be going.
5. Always spend time studying hard!