Med School Admission Interviews

Before the Interview – Preparation

Preparation for your interview is as important in its own way as prepping for the MCAT. You wouldn't walk in to the MCAT without prepping for it first, would you? The same goes for interviewing.

Grooming and Dress

Men should be professionally dressed in a suit, and well-groomed, including facial hair.

While women are not required to wear a suit, you must still look professional. Color choice is open, but conservative colors work best. Some people say that women should not wear black or red suits to interviews, but if that is what you feel your best in, go for it. The other question is a pant suit vs. skirt? Once again, if you look professional, wear what suits you and your personality best. You should also wear minimal jewelry, simple makeup, and simple hair. Wear shoes you can walk/tour in. Your shoes don't have to be new, but should be clean and polished.

There is an adage about how you should look like a physician before you are one. While looks are not everything, the interviewers do look at how you are dressed and groomed as well as how you carry yourself. Most evaluate whether they would want someone like you to treat them or a member of their family.

Mental Preparation

Interview Questions

To a great extent, this is the most important part of your interview, and it takes place before you even get there. Though it is crucial that you be yourself at your interview, you will be asked questions that you need to think about ahead of time. You should also be able to answer these questions in their various forms, succinctly, when asked.

- Why do you want to become a doctor?
- How did you get here?
- Why would you be a good doctor?
- What are your strengths? Your weaknesses?
- What would you do if you don't get in to medical school?
- What do you feel are the most important qualities in being a good doctor?
- What do you do to alleviate stress? What are your hobbies?
- Are you a leader or a follower? Give examples...
- What exposure have you had to the medical profession? Healthcare experience? What did you do when you volunteered at …?
- What do you think you will like most about medicine/being a doctor? Least?
MOST OF ALL, know what you want the interviewers to know about you and what information they should leave the interview with. What is the impression you want to leave with them... what is it they need to know about you, which shows them that you'd be a great doctor and a perfect match for their school?

_Ethics and Healthcare_
Many medical school interviewers like to ask about an ethical or moral dilemma. This can be about very controversial issues such as abortion or euthanasia, but it can also be about healthcare rationing, Medicare/immigrant healthcare, preventative medicine, withdrawal or withholding nutrition/hydration, assisted suicide, etc. Don't answer what you think the interviewer would like to hear. State what YOU believe, but be able to back it up and explain why you believe that.

Interviewers also like to ask about managed healthcare and changes in the US healthcare system, such as the new regulations regarding residency hours. Read the paper, magazine articles, medical journals, etc.

_The Medical School_
You will be asked why you want to go to that school. So, why DID you apply there? What kind of experiences are you looking for in a medical school? What is important to you?
Volunteer/student organizational opportunities... do you want to get involved with your med school class or do you tend to just want to do your work and go home?

Ask about…

Cl**inal exposure** – When do you get it and what kind of exposure is it? What kind of patient population? Urban? Rural? Community or just in-patient?

Classes – Do you care about block classes or would you rather have semester long ones? Do you want a school with problem-based or case-based classes or just lectures? Are you interested in computer-based learning?

Facilities – computers, libraries, student lounge/area, labs, lecture halls... are they nice? Do you care?

Think about what you want out of a medical school and be able to address your issues. It helps to do a bit of research in advance about the school. So not only will you be able to tell the interviewer WHY you applied, but how the strengths of that school link into your own strengths and interests. You can also use the knowledge you already have about the school to ask specific questions of the interviewer. You can find out more about a school by checking out their web site or through books like Princeton Review's _Best Medical Schools_ book.

A final word of advice on your prep... reread your AMCAS application and your secondary application to that school. Take a photocopy of both with you to skim over if you have time. Often in a non-blind interview you will be asked about things you mentioned in your secondary essays. Rereading and remembering what you actually wrote in your secondary can really save you from looking bad.
The Day of the Interview

If you need to travel more than 50 miles to your interview, consider getting a hotel room and staying over the night before. Also, many medical schools have students who have offered to put up interviewees the night before their interview. If this is the case, try to take advantage of this great opportunity to talk to the students and see the school on an informal basis. You can learn a lot!

Be prompt, if not a bit early. No matter what, you don't want to be late to your interview. You also don't want to show up more than 10 to 15 minutes early. Make sure to eat something, but not too much in case those butterflies backfire. Take it easy on the caffeine... a cup or two of coffee won't hurt but too much may make you jittery or hyper.

Most interview days include a presentation from financial aid and a tour of the medical school, if not the hospital. Often, the tour is given by first or second-year students. If you have questions, ask them. Pick their brains. Now is the time to get some of your tough questions answered. It can also be beneficial for you to take a few notes if you have the chance. Jot down the names of your interviewers for later thank you notes, and write down questions that arise as the day goes on.

During the interview, try to be relaxed and be yourself. Try to be clear, concise, and think about your answers. It's easy when you're nervous to ramble on a bit. Try to catch yourself and stop after your point is made. Try to remember to smile and make eye contact with your interviewer. Try not to fidget or fiddle with anything and don't be weird. If you don't understand a question the interviewer asks, ask them to rephrase it.

Most interviewers want to make this experience as painless for you as possible. These people are the ones who will try to sell you to the rest of the committee. They want to be on your side and generally are not out to get you.

After the Interview

Write and send thank-you notes to your interviewers and anyone who helped make your day there enjoyable. Remember, you want to make yourself stand out (in a positive light) against the hundreds of other applicants they will be interviewing.

Be patient. It can take anywhere from one week to several months before you get a final decision from the school. Different schools have different policies and approaches (try to find out about the school's process on interview day or before); often the committees fall behind schedule and it takes a bit longer than the four or six weeks they promised.

Interviews alone can't get you into medical school, but they can definitely strengthen a borderline application or completely eliminate you from contention. You can no longer change your grades or scores... those are in. But you can stand out for who you are. Show them what a warm, charming, intelligent, thoughtful and professional person you are. Be memorable and unique!
Different Types of Interviews

Includes an example of a medical school that uses that type of interview:

1. **Panel: Eastern Virginia Medical School**

This is where more than one interviewer interviews you at the same time. It can feel like the Spanish Inquisition, but try not to get over intimidated. Make eye contact with the person who has asked you the question, but also try to look at and engage the other interviewers as you make your points. Usually panel interviews are made up of people from different disciplines such as basic science/research, clinical medicine, or surgery. There is often a medical student as part of the panel. So be prepared for a wide range of questions...

2. **Blind: George Washington SOM**

This is an interview where the interviewer has not seen any part of your file. He or she does not know your grades or scores and has not read your essays. Be prepared for the worst of all possible interview questions: "So, tell me about yourself." Expect to regurgitate a lot of what you have already written in your various application essays. Your previous prep to answer the ‘so why do you want to be a doctor’ questions will really help here.

3. **Partial Blind: Loyola Stritch SOM**

This is where an interviewer only sees part of your applications, such as your essays and secondary application, but not your grades or scores. This saves you from defending your C in second semester Organic Chemistry class, but requires that you look again at what you wrote. Often times, ethical question are asked during a partial blind interview.

4. **Open: Medical College of Virginia**

In this type of interview it is up to the interviewer whether or not he or she will look at your file ahead of time. Be prepared, therefore, for "blind" type questions as well as questions addressing what you wrote in your essays.

5. **Stress Interviews:**

In this type of interview, try to keep your composure and take your time answering the questions. If they ask personal questions (which you know they aren't allowed to), there are different ways to approach the situation. You can choose to answer the question they ask, or turn it around and give an answer which asks why the interviewer thinks this is relevant, or one that tries to diffuse the situation.