

Clinical Experiences

A GUIDE FOR WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY PRE-MED STUDENTS

First and foremost, exposure to clinical medicine will help you evaluate whether a career in healthcare is the correct fit for you. This kind of experience is important to medical schools. When evaluating your competitiveness, all medical school admissions offices consider your exposure to “clinical” or patient-contact experiences. They value your work in a patient care environment – with those who are sick – to further your understanding of the field of medicine. Some schools have a specific number of clinical experience hours required, while others expect your experience to be spread over a number of settings. It’s important to check the expectations of the particular medical schools to which you apply.

It is also true that most undergraduate students are not prepared or qualified to treat patients. Thus initially, it can be challenging to gain clinical experience.

The American Medical Student Association (AMSA) provides a good overview of the types of clinical experiences that pre-medical students might look to garner, with some suggestions for how to go about doing this and insider perspectives of medical school Admissions Directors: www.amsa.org/AMSA/Libraries/Misc_Docs/PACE.sflb.ashx. With use of AMSA’s information and this guide, you will be able to find or develop meaningful clinical experience.

A TIMELINE: PLANNING FOR CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Here’s an example of a timeline of planning undergraduate premedical experiences, including patient contact, shadowing, and community service. Keep in mind that this timeline will vary among individuals.

NOTE: research is not required for medical school but if it is an interest, go for it! You really can do it anytime; it’s a matter of connecting with a professor/mentor. If you are applying to MD/PhD programs, research is a requirement.

YEAR	FOCUS
Freshman	Grades, community service
FR summer	Informational interview with your doctors, shadow
Sophomore	Grades, deepen community service, add some patient contact
SO summer	Clinical experience or research
Junior	Grades, service, expand patient care, meet with pre-med advisor
JR summer	Apply to medical school



SKILLS GAINED OR DEVELOPED THROUGH CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

- **Teamwork.** Modern medicine takes place primarily in a team approach, so it's important to gain experience observing and working collaboratively with others.
- **Empathy.** Being able to relate well with patients and families is the heart of excellent primary medical care. There's no way to develop this skill other than through time and practice.
- **Decision making.** It's one thing to decide in theory; it's another to watch medical professionals use their best judgment on the spur of the moment. And hear their thoughts as they reflect afterwards.
- **Scientific knowledge.** Being with health care providers as they treat patients will help you discern whether you love science – even if it's bloody.

SETTINGS IN WHICH STUDENTS CAN GAIN CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Hospitals

- **Shadowing physicians** – Each medical facility and/or department can decide if it will or will not allow shadowing and what requirements need to be completed. There is not a list of physicians at the Washington University School of Medicine who volunteer to have undergraduates shadow them, so arranging this will require effort on your part. The key to finding a shadowing position is to persevere, go about it in an organized fashion, and begin efforts early. For more detailed information on How to Find a Physician to Shadow, refer to the Washington University MedPrep website at <https://pages.wustl.edu/medprep/virtual-advisor/shadowing>.
- **Work as a patient transporter**
- **Volunteer as a nurse's aide**
- **Serve as a registration tech in the Emergency Room**
- **Assist in Surgical Recovery Department** (some hospitals allow this)
- **Volunteer to spend time with pediatric patients at a children's hospital** – fortunately, you are in a city that offers many outstanding pediatric facilities.

For an extensive list of St. Louis hospitals, hospices & non-profit organizations that students may contact to inquire about volunteer positions, refer to "Volunteer Opportunities" section in the Washington University MedPrep website at www.medprep.wustl.edu.

Nursing Home/Home Health Agencies/Hospice Centers

- **Work as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)** - CNAs provide hands-on care to the sick and elderly under the supervision of a nurse. CNA training is sometimes offered by nursing homes and by the local chapters of the American Red Cross. Training usually takes six to twelve weeks, followed by an examination.
- **Volunteer in a hospice or nursing home** to provide companionship and basic care to elderly and the sick. For an extensive list of St. Louis hospitals, refer to "Volunteer Opportunities" section in the Washington University MedPrep website at www.medprep.wustl.edu.



Research Participant Registry for Center of Clinical Studies at Washington University

- Pediatric Emergency Medicine Associates' Program (PEMRAP) - This program allows students to participate in clinical, pediatric, patient-oriented research projects at St. Louis Children's Hospital (SLCH) on the Washington University School of Medicine campus. Refer to <http://pages.wustl.edu/pemrap> for more information.
- BIO 265: Experiences in the Life Sciences, Section 3: Clinical Research in Barnes Emergency Medicine Department - Enroll in this course and participate in clinical, patient-oriented research in the Emergency Room of Barnes Jewish Hospital.

Volunteers for Health

- At Washington University and at many other academic medical centers, there are lists of studies for which people can volunteer to be subjects. Students can use such lists to review the studies and get the name of the researcher to contact him/her about helping with such a study. Refer to vfh.wustl.edu/ and select "browse current studies" to see a list of ongoing studies.

County Health Departments

- At the St. Louis County Health Department, there are internship and volunteer opportunities for students. Refer to <http://www.stlouisco.com/HealthandWellness/AboutYourHealthDepartment/InternshipProgram> for more information. Students should check the website for the county health department in their hometown as well as towns across the U.S. for similar opportunities.

Med Prep

- This unique Washington U. course will help you navigate the road to becoming a successful applicant to medical school while also giving you information to help you determine if medicine is the right career for you. See the Washington U. Med Prep website at <http://pages.wustl.edu/medprep>.

Summer Camp for Kids with Developmental Disabilities, Chronic Illnesses and Injuries

- Volunteer as a counselor at a camp for children with disabilities. Training is usually provided, so no prior experience is necessary. All that is needed is a desire and willingness to help a child with special needs physically, emotionally and socially. For a list of summer camps, refer to the resources listed in Appendix B.

Summer Internship or Experiential Programs

- There are a handful of intensive immersion summer programs for undergraduates pursuing a career in medicine. Programs may include some but not necessarily all of the following components: academic enrichment, shadowing, operating room observation, faculty lectures, student presentations, anatomy labs or MCAT preparation. These programs are often very competitive and/or often target groups who are under-represented in medicine. For examples of such programs, refer to the resources listed in Appendix C.

International Experiences

- There are also organizations that provide opportunities for students to be exposed to healthcare overseas. This listing is not an endorsement for any of the programs. Students should conduct their own research into an organization and consider talking to a student who is currently participating or has participated in a specific program. For examples of international clinical experiences, refer to the list of resources in Appendix D. When considering service opportunities abroad, be sure to read and understand the list of guidelines from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) to help you make appropriate and cautious decisions before engaging in a clinical experience overseas. The



“Guidelines for Premedical Students Providing Care Abroad” can be found at: <https://www.aamc.org/download/181690/data/guidelinesforstudentsprovidingpatientcare.pdf>.

- In addition, refer to the Abroad section in the Prehealth Handbook (prehealth.wustl.edu), which contains some Washington University-specific information.

Emergency Care Services

- WashU Emergency Support Team (EST) – Students have the opportunity to become trained medical responders on the WU campus, serving their community, using potentially life-saving medical skills. Refer to <http://www.est.wustl.edu/> for more information.
- Work or volunteer as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) in the community and respond to emergency calls, perform certain medical procedures and transport patients to hospitals. Training varies greatly in calendar length, depending on level of certification, but can range from two weeks to two years.

Additional Community Service Resources

- Wash U Community Service Office – The CSO helps students connect with meaningful community service opportunities, build new service initiatives in St. Louis and around the globe, and develop a sustained commitment to service that lasts beyond their years at Washington University in St. Louis. Search the agency database to find health-related opportunities at <http://communityservice.wustl.edu>
- Volunteer Match – This website can be used to find community service opportunities in your local area by searching with your zip code and area of interest. <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

MAKING IT HAPPEN

How to approach an M.D. for shadowing:

Ask your own doctor, or your family's doctor, if you can observe him or her for a few hours. Three to four weeks before you go home for a break, send an email to your M.D. saying something like this:

“Dr. Smith,

I hope you are well. My semester at Washington University has been tough but really great, too. I’m actually enjoying Organic Chemistry – and feeling more committed to the pre-med route.

I am writing to ask if you might consider letting me shadow you for a few hours over spring break. I’ll be home March 10-17 and would really appreciate the opportunity to gain some clinical exposure by watching you work. I’ve always appreciated you as a doctor, and since I’m considering Pediatrics as a specialty, I know I would really benefit from seeing your work with children and families.

Thank you for considering this request; I know how busy you are and I value your time. If I don’t hear back from you in a few weeks, I will give your office a call in the hopes of finding a mutually convenient date.

Take care,

Ben Jones”



HOW TO APPLY FOR A PROGRAM OR PARTICULAR ORGANIZATION:

Often there will be specific application instructions on a listing, asking that you submit your resume and cover letter to a particular contact person or office. Follow the instructions. The listings on CAREERlink (data base of opportunities found on www.careercenter.wustl.edu) will provide such step-by-step information.

NOTE: resume and cover letter assistance is provided every Mon-Fri, 11:00-5:00, on a walk-in basis at the Career Center. Also, check the website for sample documents.

Now engage your network: think about who you know. Widen your circle to include your professors, other Washington University staff (including the Career Center, Undergraduate Research Office, etc.), your family and friends, the greater Washington University alumni network (LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com). Reach out to any connections you can find to that organization to initiate a conversation about their work. Example:

“Dear Dr. Brown [WU Alum]:

I am a current sophomore at Washington University. I found your name on LinkedIn, as I was searching for Osteopath Physicians in the St. Louis area. I am in the process of exploring the difference between M.D. and D.O. and would greatly value a personal perspective to add to the reading I’ve done on the subject. I’m hopeful that you might have 15 minutes to talk with me by phone or in person some day in the next few months.

My email is bellepremed@wustl.edu, and my number is (314) 789-3208. If I don’t hear from you in a few weeks, I will give your office a call.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Best,

Belle Premed”

The process of making an opportunity happen can seem daunting. That’s exactly what the Career Center is for: to support you along the way. Make an appointment with an advisor by calling the front desk: (314) 935-5930.

