

Clinical Shadowing: A Worthwhile Experience for all Premeds

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Introduction

Besides good grades in classes and standardized exam scores, medical schools look for students who are deeply interested in medicine. In particular, these schools are interested in students who have shadowed physicians. Shadowing is an experience in which pre-med students get to observe patient-physician interactions in a clinical setting. This experience should not be taken flippantly. During this time, students evaluate themselves and their desires to become doctors. If shadowing cultivates and excites their passion for medicine, the experience will definitely encourage them to pursue medicine.

Shadowing is an indispensable activity for pre-med students. There are many experiences that students can lose if they dismiss the opportunity to job-shadow a physician. Medical careers, unlike other careers, involve the direct contact with sick patients. Life as a doctor is difficult to imagine unless students have clinicians in the family. This is why shadowing is essential; students gain a vicarious experience of the day-to-day activities of doctors.

Careers in medicine are widespread. Sometimes, shadowing helps narrow student's interest and also validates their pursuit of a medical career. But, what makes one initially pursue a career in medicine? It may be a clinical visit as a patient or sitting in a classroom learning biology. These are few examples of situations that inspire students to strive for a medical degree.

Here is a compilation of experiences that students at Lake Forest College had while shadowing doctors. These students' opinions are focused on how their shadowing experiences influenced their decisions of going into medical profession.

Lisa Jeziorny '07

Lisa wants to become an optometrist. Her interests generated by listening to biology class lectures about vision, but when she shadowed an optometrist, her passion for eye care became stronger.

"During the spring semester of my first year at Lake Forest College, I became interested in a career in vision. I enrolled in a biology course, entitled

"Sensing the Environment," in which the curriculum featured a three-week section on the visual pathway. It turned out that topics like rods and cones, myopia, refraction, and modern surgeries, like LASIK, were both exciting and engaging to me."

"I am currently interning for two of the best pediatric optometrists in the Chicago land area, Dr. Mary Lou French, and her partner, Dr. Amy Hansen-Kwilose. Patients come from all over the United States to see them, and they have been influential mentors, thus far. After spending three months working for these two doctors, I am able to say, with confidence, that this profession is perfect for me. Everyday is different. My main responsibility is using the auto-refractor to check-in new glasses, working hand-in-hand with the dispensing department. During any free time, Dr. Hansen teaches me how to view vessels and the optic nerve. I am also in the training process as a pre-tester and optician. Additionally, this internship has shed some light on pediatric optometry as a potential area of focus."

Lokesh Kukreja '08

I am interested in going to medical school because I would like to have a direct major impact on people's health. During my shadowing experiences, I wanted to do shadowing where I can see the works of many medical professionals. This is an opportunity that is hard to find. I spent a summer between my sophomore and junior year, following an anesthesiologist in the operating rooms at Rush North Shore Medical Center in Skokie, IL. Also, for a short period of time, I shadowed a gynecological surgeon at Highland Park Hospital in Highland Park, IL. So, I have been in many different operating rooms in the two hospitals. Additionally, during my shadowing experiences, I have been fortunate to be able to see the most new and effective surgeries by leading doctors.

I saw my shadowing experiences to be a window of opportunity to learn more about various kinds of medical professions in person. I was always overt about my feelings of likes and dislikes on things I observed in the hospitals. I observed many surgeries: repairing abdominal aortic aneurysms endovascularly, implanting a pacemaker, performing a quadruple bypass by open-heart, laparoscopic removing of a cancerous kidney, laparoscopic repair of an inguinal hernia, and orthopedic surgeries of repairing rotator cuff due to a shoulder RC tear and replacement of hips and knees. When I was following the gynecologist, I observed the doctor deliver a baby by C-section. The next time I saw the same doctor, he removed unusual fibroid formations in a woman's uterus.

There are many virtues in shadowing. First of all, I really found out that I am interested in medicine, and along with my scientific research interests, I think I want to become a clinical researcher. Second of all, I have made important, close links, with doctors. This will allow me to have expert guidance in the future. Third of all, the shadowing experience has been an enriching adventure. Through talking to doctors, nurses and medical residents in the hospitals, I have learned the qualities of hard work, responsibilities, and a sense of humor, all of which are needed to become successful in a medical profession.

Karina Nikogosian '07

Karina also wants to become an optometrist. A summer of shadowing in an eye care clinic landed her a job in the same clinic when next summer came around. The shadowing experiences confirmed her interest in the field of optometry. Though, she emphasizes that during her shadowing experiences, she has made valuable connections with optometrists, these doctors, Karina believes, can help advise her so she becomes successful in this field of medicine.

She explains, "two summers ago, I called multiple optometry offices in the area near my house. A doctor from one office, Johnson Eye Care, called me back and I asked if she needed a volunteer. I told her that I did not mind running errands or doing chores around the office, as long as I received exposure to the profession. One day a week for 5 hours, I sat in on eye exams and kept a notebook for questions. After the eye exams, I asked Dr. Schoepke about her choice of treatment for the patient and other eye health related issues. I also answered the phones, took out trash, and dropped off mail. I was always friendly and helpful to the patients, which is why I think Dr. Schoepke offered me a job at her office. This past summer I worked at Johnson Eye Care and got a complete exposure to what the profession in optometry entails. My experiences working at Johnson Eye Care helped me refine my career goals. Shadowing or working in the field of interest is the best way to learn whether the profession is right for the person. Working at Johnson Eye Care made me realize that optometry best fits my personality and now I have a mentor, Dr. Schoepke, to give me advice about the application process and further information about a career in optometry."

Shruti Pore '08

Shruti wants to be a dentist. Critically, her shadowing experiences helped her explore and understand the depth and breadth of knowledge in the field of dentistry.

"I am interested in dentistry. I have shadowed a periodontist, an orthodontist, as well as a general dentist. I spent the summer between my sophomore and junior year shadowing. I thought that it would be helpful in making up my mind. This is why I decided to shadow some dentists. The people that I shadowed were all very nice. By shadowing them I was able to understand 'a day in the life of a dentist.' Also, shadowing different kinds of dentists helped me see how, within a single profession, there are many facets to explore. I wanted to become a dentist before I ever started shadowing. Shadowing confirmed my belief that I will be happy in this particular profession."

Alina Spivak '07

Alina is interested in both osteopathic (D.O.) and allopathic (M.D.) medicine. It is worth noting that prior to shadowing, she already developed an interest in specific area of medicine in primary care of pediatrics. Shadowing helped her cultivate her interests in the field.

Alina explains, "since I am interested in pediatric medicine, I shadowed an office of five pediatric physicians who were all also hospitalists (i.e. making rounds in the hospital aside from working in private practice). I shadowed for one to three hours once a week for six months. This experience showed me the importance of forming a sincere,

compassionate, and collaborative relationship between doctors and patients. Especially in pediatrics, the doctor must attain the utmost trust of a child, so, the child allows the doctor to perform a physical and touch the child, in general. I simply followed the doctors as they saw their patients. The majority of the cases were monthly visits by children to get their immunizations, physicals, and other general examinations. However, there were also a lot of sick visits by both toddlers and older children. I heard doctor's recommendations on ear infections, flues, allergic reactions and other types of infections. Since I got to shadow all five doctors several times, I got an outstanding opportunity to see how different doctors talk, treat, and even examine their patients. I began to pick up on things that I liked how a doctor does, or how I would do something a little bit differently. One doctor told me, "The average time it takes for a doctor to interrupt a patient in explaining his/her symptoms is eight seconds". This doctor was tremendously patient and gave his patients as much time as necessary to explain what he/she felt as well as made sure that his diagnosis/treatment made perfect sense to the patient and the patient's parents. It was great seeing children several times—I got to see how they have grown and the way doctor's techniques change as the child ages. I also learned a little bit about the diet and proper care of children at different age groups. A tremendously valuable experience all in all. I definitely confirmed my desire to, not only become a primary care doctor, but a pediatrician."

Chloe Wormser '06

Chloe wants to become a veterinarian. After graduating from Lake Forest College, she wanted to gain in-depth experience in the veterinary field. One of the most exciting things that a student like Chloe acquired during her shadowing is lots of hands-on experience. During many shadowing experiences, students solely observe. There are liability issues that prevent pre-med students to have hands-on experiences. However, the opportunities to do hands-on activity will be valued by students. This activity reflects on how students came closer to experiencing physician-patient interactions.

Chloe explains, "I am interning at a small animal veterinary clinic. I work with two small animal veterinarians. The experience has been very beneficial. I have gotten a lot of hands-on experience working with animals; I help during appointments by holding animals for the veterinarians during examinations as well as assist during dental cleanings of cats and dogs. In addition, I have learned to use the laboratory equipment essential for monitoring patients and assessing animal health. For example, I have learned how to run blood analyses and how to monitor animals while they are under anesthesia using the ECG, pulse/ox, and blood pressure readings. I am planning to be a small animal veterinarian and will be entering vet school next year. Therefore, getting a head start and actually working alongside veterinarians is very valuable. Not only have I become much more comfortable working with animals, but I have really learned a lot about how to communicate with owners."

Michael Zorniak '07

How do students know that medicine is a right career for them? When Michael shadowed a physician, he wanted to use the experience to evaluate his future career goals. He saw that more than half of the

shadowing experience is not only the observation of a physician and patient interaction, but rather an introspection that shapes your curiosity for medicine.

Michael explains, "I feel that shadowing a physician was time well spent because I was given the opportunity to objectively determine whether or not being a doctor fits my personality. This objectivity did not come with the experience, but it is something I needed to bring with me. Before contacting a physician, one must assess their own personality characteristics, traits, and values. This can be done by writing a list. Thus, when one finally contacts a physician, one can objectively evaluate his/her personality fit with the profession. Then one can ask themselves, 'Can I be a doctor?' It is important to shadow several doctors because one does not want to limit their perspective on the field of medicine and cut themselves short. I have shadowed three different types of physicians (i.e. ophthalmologist, internal medicine clinician, and a family doctor). I have found that the scope of medicine is very different and ophthalmology best suites my interests and personality."

"Shadowing an ophthalmologist was an effective way for me to objectively evaluate my desire to become a physician. Getting personal exposure to medicine gave me an understanding of a clinician's role on a health care team. This opportunity also gave me a chance to place my feet in the shoes of a doctor. During my experience, I was allowed to record patient histories, administer basic ophthalmic examinations,

and research the pathology of different diseases of the eye. Shadowing a doctor has helped me determine the overlap of my interests with that of a physician's."

"I have personally been treated by an ophthalmologist who took immediate action to functionally prevent the decline of my vision. Dr. Brian Proctor, the ophthalmologist I have shadowed for over 6 months, immediately performed a procedure to repair my condition and prevent the development of scar tissue around the affected area. I would like to practice medicine for the chance to aid individuals in the manner that Dr. Proctor has aided me and many others. In my life, I have had a taste of this and I am resolute in gaining additional training. "

Conclusion

If students are considering careers in the medical profession, shadowing is essential. The experiences will make students think more seriously and attest to their motivation for taking a path toward medicine. After reading this compilation of shadowing experiences from students at Lake Forest College, consider the great benefits of shadowing if you're interested in pursuing medicine.

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