

Here's your must-have checklist for med school success

JAN 2, 2019

Staff News Writer

Here's an easy-to-navigate rundown of the top tasks students should prioritize during their first and second years of training, including resources on studying, building your CV and choosing a specialty. Keep this advice handy as you move through your early years of training.

Prepare for your first and second years. The first two years of med school often entail major changes. You have probably already felt just how big the difference between attending college and medical school is as you're determining the best ways to study, deciding whether to sleep or nap at night, or cancelling plans for the second consecutive Saturday and drinking your third cup of coffee. No matter the issue, life in medical school is unique and requires its own strategies to succeed.

The first two years can be very rewarding. While specific courses vary by medical school, you will spend your first year in lectures and labs, mastering your knowledge of basic sciences and human anatomy. By year two, you should be prepping for your first licensing exams—either Step 1 of the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) or the first portion of the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Exam.

Note: The AMA selected Kaplan Medical as a preferred provider to support you in reaching your goal of passing the USMLE® or COMLEX-USA®. AMA members can save 30 percent on access to additional study resources, such as Kaplan's Qbank and High-yield courses.

If you're preparing for the USMLE exams, you might want to know which questions are most often missed by test-prep takers. Check out examples of questions from Kaplan Medical, which include an expert explanation of the answer.

Plan your career. The early years of medical school also offer you the chance to dive into your medical passions and broaden your exposure to different practice fields. By the time you begin clinical rotations, you should have a clearer sense of your professional interests.

When the time does come, the AMA offers tools to aid you in choosing your medical specialty, including the "Ask the Experts" video series, produced by FREIDA,TM the AMA Residency &

Fellowship Database®. For specialty-specific insight, the AMA's "Shadow Me" Specialty Series offers perspective from physicians in fields such as infectious disease, adolescent medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation, radiology and orthopedic surgery, among others.

Start building your CV. Getting published or gaining new clinical skills early in training can help you build a stronger application for residency programs. Expand your CV by taking advantage of the following resources and opportunities:

- | The AMA's Section Involvement Grant. This program helps students fund innovative events at their medical school campuses. Hosting an event is a great way to get involved in your medical community while developing CV-worthy leadership skills.
- | Where to publish: Top journals for physicians in training. Knowing where to submit your research is half the battle of breaking into medical publishing. Check out this must-have list of journals that accept submissions from trainees.
- | 9 top tips for getting published in a medical journal. These tips are from published residents and fellows and the deputy editor of JAMA.

Learn to balance work and wellness. While it may be tempting to spend every free moment studying, try to avoid doing so. Replacing personal hobbies and self-care with endless work can lead to burnout. Instead, try to take mindful breaks for yourself, even if only for a half-hour each day. Follow this advice to develop healthy habits on a student budget and schedule:

- | 6 ways to avoid "distress" in medical school. Learn the key signs of student distress, so you can boost well-being during medical school.
- | The recipe for success: How to eat right in med school. A lack of structure can prove to be a significant barrier to eating right in medical school. But we spoke to one expert who says it's possible with careful planning.
- | Advice for a med student's must-have—a sound night's sleep. Research indicates medical students aren't getting enough quality sleep. The right habits can change that.
- | How volunteering can make you happier and healthier. Caring for patients at volunteer clinics can give you experience and feed your passion for medicine and offer a mental break from some of the daily stressors that lead to burnout.

Join student clubs and specialty groups. Deepening your knowledge of specialties is crucial to your success in residency and practice. Exposing yourself to versatile fields of practice can help you choose a specialty based on genuine insights rather than limited knowledge.

By the end of year two, plan to contact physicians in your specialty of interest to ask if you can shadow them. This will help you arrange clerkships and meet physicians who can offer guidance as you choose your specialty in your third year.