As a medical student, do you ever wonder what it’s like to be an obesity specialist? Here’s your chance to find out.

Meet Ethan Lazarus, MD, an obesity specialist and featured physician in AMA Wire’s® “Shadow Me” Specialty Series, which offers advice directly from physicians about life in their specialties. Dr. Lazarus is the secretary treasurer of the Obesity Medicine Association (OMA) and the OMA delegate for the AMA.

Read his insights to help determine whether a career in obesity medicine might be a good fit for you.
“Shadowing” Dr. Lazarus

**Specialty:** Obesity medicine

**Practice setting:** Solo

**Years in practice:** 18

**A typical day in my practice:**

I see patients Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. I spend 30 minutes with follow-up patients and 60 minutes with new patients. I teach free classes on obesity and related topics one or two times per week. When not at the office, I speak either at CME conferences or for pharmaceutical companies about once a week. I also serve as an adviser to Novo Nordisk regarding obesity treatment.

**The most challenging and rewarding aspects of caring for patients in obesity medicine:**

Patients lose weight, then stop treatment, then they regain the weight and blame themselves. It is hard to get people to accept that obesity is a chronic disease. There is also a lot of bias against treating obesity as a disease, particularly with regards to the use of anti-obesity medications. Further, there is public perception that obesity is primarily a result of eating too much and exercising too little, so most individuals affected by obesity combat it by trying to eat less and move more. Unfortunately, since eating too much and exercising too little are not thought to be the cause of obesity, but perhaps instead the result of obesity, all too often the person ends up even heavier.

**Three adjectives that describe the typical obesity specialist:**


**How my lifestyle matches or differs from what I envisioned in med school:**

It is completely different—I thought I’d be a surgeon. Instead, I spend the majority of my time either counseling patients or educating physicians. I never envisioned the speaking part of my career.

**One skill every physician in training should have for obesity medicine but won’t be tested for on the board exam:**

Motivational interviewing.
One question every physician in training should ask themselves before pursuing this specialty:

Do I really think that obesity is a disease? If so, am I willing to treat it with the same seriousness, compassion and respect as other diseases?

Books every medical student interested in obesity medicine should read:

- *Mindless eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* by Brian Wansink, PhD
- *Best Weight: A Practical Guide to Office-based Obesity Management* by Yoni Freedhoff, MD, and Arya Sharma, MD, PhD

Online resources students interested in my specialty should follow:

- Obesity Medicine Association

If I had a mantra to describe my life in this specialty, it’d be: Obesity is primarily a physiological phenomenon. This means that obesity is more complex than “eat less, exercise more.”

Want to learn more about your specialty options?

- Read more profiles in *AMA Wire’s “Shadow Me” Specialty Series* to learn additional insights from physicians in such specialties as neurology, nephrology, otolaryngology, vascular surgery and infectious disease, among others.
- Review a *JAMA®* article outlining the biological drivers of weight gain.
- Check out the *AMA’s Choosing a Medical Specialty* resource guide (PDF - member log in required).
- Be sure to avoid these 5 common mistakes students make when choosing a specialty.