

# How to spend your final free summer as a med student

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As a medical student, the summer following your first year of training might be the last one you experience without academic or professional structure until your retirement. Making the most of that time, then, is critical to one's personal and professional development.

So what's the best way to spend that last free summer? We asked a few med students for guidance on this question.

## Grow and explore as a clinician

Between school-sponsored electives and volunteer opportunities, the summer following a medical students M1 year offers trainees the chance to interact with patients to grow their skills.

Halea K. Meese, a third-year medical student at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, participated in a rural medicine program that her school offers for credit. The experience sent her to Oak Creek, Colorado, a town near the Colorado-Wyoming border. During the eight weeks she spent there, Meese got sustained hands-on clinical experience that wasn't available to her as an M1.

"To me that summer is about making sure you are getting exposure to something and making sure you are using that time to explore," she said.

"For me it was something I'd never experienced before. I grew up in a suburban town and lived in cities, I hadn't ever really been in a place that had a more rural base of patients with potentially different world views"

The time Meese spent in Oak Creek now has her considering opportunities to work as a family physician in a rural setting.

## Earn some money

Most medical students will tell you that med school is a full-time job. If you follow that line of thinking, the summer following M1 may be your last chance to earn some cash on the side for quite a while. There may be the opportunity to work in a medical capacity and earn money as an extern or summer fellow as well. Your school might be able to provide some guidance on those opportunities.

## Learn in the lab

Doing research after your M1 summer gives you exposure to new career possibilities and the chance to build your CV. One former medical student said that when it comes to research, starting earlier in your medical school career offers a leg up—and what better time than the summer after your first year of training.

“Even if you’ve never done [research] and haven’t decided on a specialty, simply ask a department or individual, and most are very happy to help,” said Tessa Stamile, MD, an emergency physician who attended the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. “The earlier you start, the better your chances will be to complete the project and get published.”

## Use the summer to recharge

In light of the impending work load, many medical students find value in using the summer following M1 year for some rest and relaxation.

For Stephanie Strohbeen, now in her second year at the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Wausau campus, that summer was best spent with her family.

“I have kids and a husband and they were my priority during that summer,” she said. “It was something that I needed. It was something my family needed to reconnect. We were able to do some traveling and I really value those experiences I’m able to give to my children. It was the right decision for me.”

As Strohbeen’s comments indicate, the best way to spend this time is going to depend on the student.

“We all look at medicine differently and approach it differently,” she said. “Everybody has their own path and it’s important to find your path and be comfortable with what that is.”