

Why are you pursuing a career in medicine? Interviewers will ask.

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Brendan Murphy

Senior News Writer

Some medical schools receive thousands of applications for a couple hundred openings. If you, as a prospective medical student, make it to the interview process, you are likely an attractive candidate on paper. Your admissions interview—whether it's in-person or through a virtual platform—represents a chance to distinguish yourself from a crowded and competitive field.

Admissions interviews vary in format by school. You may speak to one person or a number of people. They may be students, alumni, community members, professors, deans or some combination thereof. Still, while the audience and venues for these interviews may change, one question is likely to remain constant: Why do you want to go into medicine?

Medical students and faculty involved in medical school admissions chimed in on the best ways to answer that question. Here's a snapshot of what they had to say.

Find out how you can ace your medical school admissions interview.

Tell your story. Tonya Fancher, MD, MPH, is the associate dean for workforce innovation and community engagement at the University of California, Davis, School of Medicine (UC Davis). The medical school is one of the members of the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium working together to create the medical schools of the future and transform physician training.

Dr. Fancher says many students approach the interview in an almost formulaic way. When it comes time to explain your motivations for pursuing a career in medicine, she said “it's more useful when you talk about why you are different.”

“What's most interesting is who you are and what you will bring to the table” as a physician, Dr. Fancher added. Those reasons could include a personal experience with illness and the transformative effect it had. What is important, she noted, is for the applicant to meaningfully reflect on

their experiences and their impact.

“Tell me what you learned about yourself from that experience and how it shaped the way you think about caring for people,” Dr. Fancher said.

Don’t be too technical. The mechanics of medicine are fascinating. That said, your motivation for pursuing a career in medicine shouldn’t be entirely scientific, one medical student believes.

“Before undergrad, I wanted to be a doctor because I liked science and helping people,” said Avi Levy, a fourth-year medical student at Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine. “After undergrad, I ended up volunteering in Guatemala, and I realized there’s so much to medicine. I decided to get an MPH, and through that process I was drawn to how doctors were advocates for their patients and communities.

“Wanting to be a doctor because you enjoy science is a good start,” Levy said, “but you need more than that.”

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Draw from all your life experience. Many medical students have prior volunteer experience in some medical setting, but it’s hardly a requisite for medical school admissions. Your experiences outside of medicine—particularly personal experiences during the pandemic, when volunteering was limited—could have helped prepare you to interact with patients, in an important sense.

“If you finished college, became a teacher, then decided that maybe you want to pursue medical school, you probably didn’t have time to volunteer at a doctor’s office or a free clinic,” Dr. Fancher said. “But what you learn as a teacher is the skill set we want from doctors. Your students are like your patients. You have to learn about them, what they might need, to help them.”

Demonstrate passion. Approaching medical school as though it’s something you are supposed to do—rather than something you feel compelled to do—doesn’t make a positive impression.

“A bad answer is to say, ‘So-and-so are doctors and therefore I want to be a doctor,’” Dr. Fancher said. “Instead, highlight what it is about that person that inspires you.”

Medicine can be a career that is both challenging and highly rewarding but figuring out a medical school’s prerequisites and navigating the application process can be a challenge into itself. The [AMA pre-med glossary guide](#) has the answers to frequently asked questions about medical school, the application process, the MCAT and more.

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to start med school off strong with the AMA.