

## 4 tips for choosing the right medical school

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**Brendan Murphy**

News Writer

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Where do you see yourself in four years?

As a prospective medical student, the answer to that is likely to be accepting a medical degree. But getting to that stage requires finding the right venue to hone your skills.

Picking a medical school may be one of the biggest decisions you make at this early juncture in your physician career. It also is one that can have career-shaping ramifications. What advice do medical students offer for those weighing medical schools? Let's take a look.

### Speak to those in the know

Damani McIntosh-Clarke, now a fourth-year medical student at George Washington School of Medicine & Health Sciences, applied to 20 medical schools. When it came time to narrow down the list of finalists, he sought first-hand accounts from those who could best offer them.

"If you can, I'd emphasize talking to students in a less formal environment," said McIntosh-Clarke. "Either through your networks or if you just want to cold email a student, they will likely be receptive. To me, that's the best way to get information on a program."

### Consider your support system

Whether it's institutional or external, you're going to need help during medical school. For Avani K. Patel, now a fourth-year medical student at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson, that meant looking at programs close to her family.

"College is change, but med school is a life change," Patel said. "There's so much information in so little time. It's nice to have a support system close by if you need it. That was important to me. I

couldn't imagine starting somewhere totally new and not having the support of loved ones nearby."

## **Honor your deal breakers**

McIntosh-Clarke grew up in Barbados, so most every location stateside would include a change in the weather. Still, he couldn't imagine going anywhere with a harsher climate than Philadelphia, where he completed his undergraduate studies.

"I'm glad I chose to come to D.C.," he said. "We have winter, but it's not that bad. If I did go to school in a place like Boston, for example, I would've been able to manage, but I would've been so miserable during winter. Here the winters are very manageable."

## **Align your passions with your program**

McIntosh-Clarke is social justice-minded. He wanted a medical school that represented his values.

"I wanted to find a fit where people were friendly and the school had good diversity in faculty and staff," he said. "A medical school that was interested in serving a diverse population, and really valued treating everyone. [George Washington] also has a big emphasis on public health. Because I was interested in health policy, D.C. was the perfect place to go to med school."