What it’s like to specialize in obesity medicine: Shadowing Dr. Stanford

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Staff News Writer

As a medical student, do you ever wonder what it’s like to specialize in obesity medicine for children and adults? Meet Fatima Cody Stanford, MD, MPH, MPA, an obesity medicine physician and a featured doctor in the AMA’s “Shadow Me” Specialty Series, which offers advice directly from physicians about life in their specialties. Check out her insights to help determine whether a career in obesity medicine might be a good fit for you.

The AMA’s Specialty Guide simplifies medical students’ specialty selection process, highlight major specialties, detail training information, and provide access to related association information. It is produced by FREIDA™, the AMA Residency & Fellowship Database®.

“Shadowing” Dr. Stanford (@fstanfordmd)

Specialty: Obesity medicine.

Practice setting: Academic medical hospital.

Employment type: Employed by hospital.

Years in practice: 12.

A typical day and week in my practice: There is no typical day. There is large variation with regards
to patient care, research, lectures, media engagements and media work. I work on average 80–90 hours per week.

**The most challenging and rewarding aspects of obesity medicine:** I don’t like that my patients face bias due to poor education in medicine and the lay population about obesity as a disease.

I love to see patients achieve success. There is nothing more gratifying than to see patients have an improved outlook on life when they achieve a healthier weight and are able to help resolve their obesity-related illnesses.

**Three adjectives to describe the typical obesity medicine physician:** Engaged. Optimistic. Determined.

**How my lifestyle matches, or differs from, what I had envisioned:** I had no idea that I would be able to pursue a career in obesity medicine as it did not exist when I was in medical school. As such, I did not envision what my life would be like in the specialty. My life in the specialty differs from most as I am very forward facing and spend time educating others throughout the world about the disease of obesity through travel to give lectures and interact with the media around the U.S. and throughout the world.

**Skills every physician in training should have for obesity medicine but won’t be tested for on the board exam:** We are not educated about obesity consistently in any medical school here in the U.S. This is a travesty, as about 40% of the adult population and 19% of the pediatric population has the disease of obesity. Many still believe obesity to be a lifestyle choice despite the acknowledgement of obesity as a disease by the AMA in 2013. It is quite unsettling.

**One question physicians in training should ask themselves before pursuing obesity medicine:** Are you ready to embrace a specialty in which the variation in the human race and response to therapy may be quite dramatic?

**Books every medical student interested in obesity medicine should be reading:** My book, *Facing Overweight and Obesity: A Complete Guide for Children and Adults*, which was edited by my Massachusetts General Hospital colleagues Jonathan R. Stevens, MD, MPH, and Theodore A. Stern, MD. We believe it is a comprehensive guide to the complexity and challenges in obesity.

**The online resource students interested in obesity medicine should follow:** There are a few worth following: ConscienHealth, The Obesity Society, Obesity Medicine Association and the American Board of Obesity Medicine.
Quick insights I would give students who are considering obesity medicine: This is an exciting field in which we are learning new information each day. Get ready for a wild ride.

Mantra or song to describe life in obesity medicine: “Survivor,” by Destiny’s Child.