What it’s like to specialize in dermatology: Shadowing Dr. Jones

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Staff News Writer

As a medical student, do you ever wonder what it’s like to specialize in dermatology? Meet Evelyn Jones, MD, a dermatologist and a featured physician 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 dermatology might be a good fit for you.

“Shadowing” Dr. Jones

Specialty: Dermatology.

Practice setting: Solo.

Employment type: Private practice.

Years in practice: 26.

A typical day and week in my practice: I am an early riser and love to have time in the morning to

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have hot tea, breakfast, Bible reading and meditation prior to getting to the office.

I arrive at the office about 7:30 a.m. and every morning at about 7:50 a.m. the entire office gathers together for announcements, updates and prayer requests. I have found this to be very helpful for our office of 22 staff members to stay connected and focused on our purpose, our mission and our core values. It also allows us to know and understand each other better as we share burdens or concerns weighing on us as well as our blessings and gratitude. I also lead a monthly 7:30 a.m. staff meeting communicating practice expectations, procedural and product updates, and all business-related news.

My days are filled with an incredible variety of patients starting at 8:30 a.m. I see children, teens, men and women of all ages with multiple dermatology and cosmetic concerns, such as acne, rosacea, psoriasis, lupus, eczema, bacterial and fungal infections, atypical moles, and skin cancers. I typically divide my work week into half days of either seeing patients or doing in-office surgeries. During our surgery half days, I will also do several Botox and Dysport injection treatments.

A typical workday involves reviewing and processing pathology reports in between seeing patients or at the end of the day. Answering questions about treatment plans, medications, biologics, etc. are all part of the process. Email is another significant part of my everyday routine.

Carving out time every day for lunch is a necessity for me. Refueling with mostly plant-based, whole foods and a few minutes of stretching or yoga with our wellness coordinator is a rejuvenating experience that propels me through the rest of the day.

One day a week specific attention is devoted to business decisions, visionary changes, billing and coding updates, and documentation. My desire for patients to receive the best and healthiest skin care products has necessitated ongoing research, marketing, education and social media. In addition, routine seminars for educational development are planned and developed for our patients, clients and community.

I am passionate about the preventive side of medicine: health and wholeness as it relates to nutrition, physical activity, mindfulness and stress reduction since I battled with my own health issues several years ago. This took me on a journey to build on the wellness information from medical school and truly study in depth how our lifestyle choices are, in many circumstances, the root of many diseases but can also be the vehicles for healing.

I love the opportunity to educate patients about lifestyle changes and choices they can make that will positively impact their skin health and overall well-being. That is so very exciting to me. That can also be a frustration when patients are not motivated to make those changes. But that can become a wonderful opportunity for me to empower them and equip them to believe in themselves.

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The most challenging and rewarding aspects of dermatology: Time management with a very busy practice and business development has to be the most challenging part of my life as a dermatologist. Even managing self-care in the midst of it presents its own difficulties. But the most frustrating aspect is the continual challenge of trying to get medications that I know are best for my patients, covered at an affordable price. In dermatology, the vehicle of a specific medication is very important to the outcome and a substitution based on an insurance or pharmaceutical company decision is extremely frustrating.

The beautiful relationships with my patients and staff is a gift beyond words. I fell in love with dermatology for several reasons:

- I am a visual learner and dermatology is a field where you can have full visual aspect to the organ being treated.
- I enjoy the variety seen in a dermatology practice, with a combination of surgical and medical work; young and old; male and female patients.
- Dermatology can be a stepping stone for diagnostic testing. Many times, the skin changes and diseases are a reflection of other systemic issues in the body, making a visual inspection and possible biopsy easier access for diagnostic testing.
- Opportunities are provided for meaningful discussion about lifestyle choices affecting skin disease and skin health.
- Caring for self-conscious teenagers with acne and helping them gain self-confidence again when the acne is controlled is especially rewarding. Patients with psoriasis also become self-conscious, but with the advancement in treatments, the skin can frequently be cleared, improving comfort as well as confidence.
- Skin cancer, especially melanoma, is one of the fastest growing cancers—particularly in young women in their 20s—related to tanning-bed usage as well as ultraviolet light exposure. I'm grateful for the opportunities to help people protect and guard against the threat of cancer.
- Seeing improvement and relief of chronic itching in children with eczema or atopic dermatitis following treatment is common but always a delight for me.

Three adjectives to describe the typical dermatologist: Attentive, thorough, caring.

How my lifestyle matches, or differs from, what I had envisioned: The part that does not differ is the daily encounters with patients for medical, surgical and cosmetic care. I had a wonderful residency experience at the University of Louisville with Jeff Callen, MD, as the chairman of the department. He and the rest of the program staff prepared me with the confidence to see patients, along with the skill set to be a lifelong learner, by reading and staying up to date with advancements in dermatology.
The part that differs from my medical school vision is the business aspect. I started my own practice in dermatology 26 years ago and have learned from my own mistakes, and from the help and guidance of others. I never realized how life-encompassing my dermatology practice would become. Running a busy practice would evolve into beautiful days filled with private and public speaking and teaching, mentoring and guiding, as well as continual research and learning for my own benefit and that of my patients and clients.

Skills every physician in training should have for dermatology but won’t be tested for on the board exam: Curiosity, patience, and resourcefulness in order to research and find the right treatment options, and empowering patients to own their own health choices and avoid becoming victim to a diagnosis.

One question physicians in training should ask themselves before pursuing dermatology: Do you enjoy a totally office-based practice? Do you enjoy a very fast-paced office setting? Do you enjoy short surgical procedures along with medical dermatology?

Books every medical student interested in dermatology should be reading: This is impossible to narrow down because we all have our own personal interests. Obviously medical journal reading is important. But I also fully enjoy preventative medicine type of books such as:

- *Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition*, by T. Colin Campbell, PhD, and Howard Jacobson.
- *How Not to Die*, by Michael Greger, MD.
- *Deadly Emotions: Understand the Mind-Body-Spirit Connection That Can Heal or Destroy You*, by Don Colbert, MD.
- *Beauty by the Book*, by Nancy Stafford.
- *Food and Behavior: A Natural Connection*, by Barbara Reed Stitt.
- *None of These Diseases*, by S.I. McMillen, MD, and David E. Stern, MD.
With physician burnout becoming an epidemic, I would highly recommend *Finding Heart in Art: A Surgeon's Renaissance Approach to Healing Modern Medical Burnout*, by Shawn C. Jones, MD. Dr. Jones is my husband and I admire him tremendously for his transparency in writing about his story with a desire to help other physicians. (*Editor’s note: Read more about Dr. Jones in our earlier news story, “Renaissance man: A surgeon’s healing journey through art history.”*)

Physicians are natural leaders in their offices, hospitals and communities, and it is important to intentionally develop leadership skills. There are many books to read on this subject that are very valuable. Here is just one example: *Leading Well from Within: A Neuroscience and Mindfulness-Based Framework for Conscious Leadership*, by Daniel Friedland, MD.

The online resource students interested in dermatology should follow: I would recommend *Dermatology Times*, a clinical news magazine focusing on the latest developments in dermatologic practice, including clinical trends, regulatory news, practice management issues and new products. I would also recommend *VisualDx*.

**Quick insights I would give students who are considering dermatology:** Seek out opportunities to spend time with different dermatologists. Observe the differences between the following to have a truly valid understanding of the vast array of practice options: private practice of general, surgical, and cosmetic dermatology, pediatric dermatology, dermatopathology and academic-based dermatology. Evaluate your likes and dislikes.

**More about choosing a specialty**

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