

Second time's a charm: Your guide to reapplying to medical school

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If you didn't get into medical school on your first application cycle, you may be wondering whether you can reapply to medical school. The answer is definitively yes. In fact, during the 2018–2019 application cycle, more than a quarter of medical school applications came from candidates who had previously applied, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

So what does it take to make it into a medical school if you didn't get in during your first application cycle? One expert with more than three decades' experience in admissions offered a few tips for those who are trying to make it work on the second try.

Request feedback

John D. Schriener, PhD, is associate dean for admissions and student affairs at Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, one of 37 member schools of the AMA's Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium.

Schriener says every year he will have a few "difficult conversations" with applicants who did not get into his program. They also can be productive, however.

"The old adage is that you never can address a problem until it's identified," he said. "So if you don't get in, I'd solicit feedback from the medical school as to why things didn't work out in that initial application cycle. Some medical schools are more receptive to that, and we fall in that category. I'd get the feedback and determine what the selection committee thought to be the shortcomings."

Act on the advice

If you get feedback, the natural follow-up question should be how can one improve upon any shortcomings and enhance your viability for the next application cycle. If the problems are with academic metrics, you can retake the Medical College Admission Test or enroll in post-baccalaureate programs designed for medical school applicants that have a focus on science. You can also strengthen your credentials by pursuing a master's degree in a related subject.

“Just don't reapply with the same application,” Schriener said. “Chances are you'll get the same results. We look to see how a student has taken our advice and acted on it, whether it's experience or academics. We want to see a marked difference in the candidate's profile.”

Fuel for personal growth

If you reapply to the same program, the admissions officers will know. What appears to be a failure on paper, however, can be evidence of one's perseverance.

“If I were the candidate, I would address it and speak to how I have enhanced my viability in the new cycle,” Schriener said. “Talk about how you continued building your knowledge base or engaged with meaningful research—whatever the enhancements were that had taken place since the last application cycle. That would show the tenacity and desire to be part of the program. It's the old you-can't-tell-me-no once sort of approach.

“I see this every year, and the gratifying thing is to see [an applicant] reapply, review their credentials and see them follow their course of action and do everything you asked of them. When you see they did that, you give them another good, strong look.”