

Pre-meds: Make your mark in medical school multiple mini-interviews

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Physicians are required to think on their feet. The multiple mini-interview (MMI) format of medical school admissions interviews requires the same skill.

Though most medical schools still rely on traditional interviews, the MMI format is growing in popularity, with more medical schools assessing applicants with a hybrid of traditional interviews and MMIs.

The MMI is a series of six to 10 brief interactions (or mini-interviews) conducted at different stations over a two-hour time frame.

From an institutional vantage point, the goal of the MMI is to mitigate bias in the interview process and allow for more diverse opinions on each applicant.

MMIs are taking place in the virtual realm as well, though some formats are being modified. At University of California, Davis, School of Medicine, in-person MMIs included actors to interact with applicants while members of the school admissions committee observed. The school has been unable to replicate that exercise online, so is employing a hybrid model with some similarities of both MMI and traditional interviews but over Zoom.

Jorge Girotti, PhD, is a research assistant professor and the former associate dean for admissions and special curricular programs at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago (UIC). In addition to his work at UIC, he has consulted for institutions that have implemented the MMI.

The aim, he said, is to have each medical school applicant “go through the same stations and be assessed on the same scenarios.”

Here are a few tips about the MMI offered by Girotti and a recent medical student who went through the MMI.

It's not about being right

In an MMI, questions are going to open a variety of avenues for the applicant to pursue.

“The questions are meant to be open-ended,” Girotti said. “One of the first things we tell interviewers is the scenarios don't necessarily have a right answer. The purpose is to see how well a person puts an answer together. Is it logical? Does it have a beginning, middle and end?”

Draw on your experiences

You don't have much time to gather your answers, but the time you do have should be focused on drawing from real-life examples that may apply to the question.

“The way that candidates put their thoughts together in the limited time frame, the notions of genuineness and depth, apply in the MMI setting,” Girotti said. “If you can put together lessons you have learned, that answer will resonate more with those who are evaluating you.”

Clinical knowledge isn't expected

“Even if you have the most wonderful clinical volunteer exposure, you are coming to medical school to learn to be a clinician,” Girotti said. Taking that into account, MMI questions aren't going to deal with anatomy or immunology.

Instead, Girotti adds that questions “pertain to issues of teamwork, leadership skills, some relate to day-to-day situations that arise in college.” Ethical challenges and academic dishonesty—that is, cheating—also may be on the docket.

“These are things most college students can relate to,” Girotti said.

Confidence can matter

If you've made it to the interview stage of your candidacy, a medical school is expressing interest in you. That should boost your confidence.

Avani Patel, MD, MHA, experienced the MMI format when she interviewed for medical schools.

"As a future physician, you need to be confident in yourself, your ability and your training," said Dr. Patel, a psychiatry resident at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. "I believe they were looking for someone who holds strong and who understands that what you would do for yourself is what you would do for somebody else."