

6 things they don't tell you about life in medical school

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Entering medical school, there are a number of curricular expectations for which medical schools prepare incoming students. Still, some things are bound to catch new students off guard. Medical students and medical school faculty spoke with the AMA to cover a few key topics that may surprise aspiring medical students.

You can still have a social life

You're bound to spend more time studying than you did in your undergraduate studies. Still, if you prioritize your time, you can meet new people and have a social life.

"Often, premeds are told their life will be over for four to five years," said Lindia J. Willies-Jacobo, MD, associate dean for admissions and professor at Kaiser Permanente School of Medicine, which will welcome its first class of medical students in the fall. "That's by no means true. They can continue to socialize and build community with their peers and also have a life outside of medical school."

Weekends may not be the time for fun

Avani Patel is a forthcoming graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson. Earlier on in her medical school career, she had exams every Monday. That meant that weekends were typically not her time to catch up with friends or go out. She instead started to make plans on Monday nights and attend events during the week that were put on by her school.

"It's up to you if you want to be socially active," Patel said. "But you are going to have to make priorities and be strategic about it to balance your commitments."

Cliques are common

Some students say medical school is comparable to high school in some of the not-so-beneficial ways.

“I’m from the South, so it’s already cliquy down here,” said Patel. “It’s your choice if you want to be cliquy or not. I like to have multiple friend groups and get to know people on all levels.”

Competition is stiff

From day one of medical school, your colleagues are your support system but could also be seen as competitors for those ultra-competitive residency slots. That can make for some interesting social dynamics.

“I thought I found a great friend group my first year, and they were wonderful people. I realized that they were very high-performing and that became unhealthy for me,” Patel said. “I doubted myself; I felt bad about myself. We would talk about grades and compare test scores, and that was toxic for me. It had nothing to do with them and everything to do with me. I found I needed to separate myself from them.

“I ended up finding another group of friends, and we never talked about grades and supported each other, and that’s really what I needed.”

Your old friends may not understand

As much as they want you to succeed in medical school, your friends may not totally understand the time and emotional energy that goes into medical school. When you start missing marquee events such as weddings and birthdays, they may take it personally, Patel said.

“You’re so busy that it’s really difficult to make the time,” Patel said. “There’s a give and take, and some friends understand, those are the people you can pick up where you left off with.”

Your classmates will understand

Your classmates and students in the classes ahead of you have a rare ability to relate to the daily

grind you're experiencing. That can be a very valuable resources to cope with stress.

"It's really nice to have people who are going through the same things you are to be there to provide support," Patel said. "We have an M1-M2 buddy system, and I think most med schools do, so a lot of people utilize their upperclassman friends as a sound board. It's very helpful to talk to them about what you are struggling with since they have gone through the same things."

Medicine can be a career that is both challenging and highly rewarding, but figuring out a medical school's prerequisites and navigating the application process can be a challenge into itself. The AMA premed glossary guide has the answers to frequently asked questions about medical school, the application process, the MCAT and more.

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to start med school off strong with the AMA.