Accepted by more than 1 medical school? Consider these factors

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With only about 40% of applicants earning admission to medical school, those who land multiple medical school acceptances are a fortunate few. If you find yourself in that situation ahead of the late April deadline to decide, how do you go about making this high-stakes choice about which medical school to attend?

Having the benefit of experience, some medical school students who landed multiple acceptances spoke with the AMA to offer premeds their insights on these key factors to consider.

How the medical school evaluates students

During the preclinical years—typically the first two years of training—pass-fail grading is becoming a more common practice. During the 2018–2019 academic year, more than 100 schools used that evaluation method. It is far less common in clinical training. According to AAMC data, that number dips to the low teens during clerkship grading.

“The grading system during the first two years was a big factor in my decision,” said Matt Christensen, an AMA member and third-year medical student at Chicago Medical School, part of the Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science. “I chose a school that is pass-fail during the first two years, which promotes much more unity among students and relieves the stress and competition associated with class rank or traditional letter grades.”

Learn more about trends in how medical schools are using pass-fail grading.
Placing the proper importance on perceived prestige

Your residency placement is more likely to depend on your body of work than where you accomplished it.

“Many premeds place tremendous importance on a medical school’s specific ranking in national ‘best of’ lists,” said Haidn Foster, an AMA member and third-year medical student at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine (UC). “And there is some truth to the notion that attending a ‘top 10’ school can boost your chances when applying for residency programs. Setting aside these truly elite schools, however, residency programs tend to prioritize many other factors over an applicant’s school’s ranking—a number that often has more to do with institutional research funding than quality of education.”

Foster’s impression appears to have some support in the medical literature. For example, a Journal of Graduate Medical Education study of first-year residents the University of Michigan Health System, researchers evaluated performance data from nearly 1,800 new residents over a 10-year period. That study—entitled “Assessing Residents’ Competency at Baseline: How Much Does the Medical School Matter?”—found that where residents attended medical schools is “weakly correlated with clinical competency as measured by a standardized objective structured clinical examination.”

Learn why the best medical school is often more about the right fit than the top rankings.

The long-term impact of cost

Funding medical school is a top consideration for many medical students. The median tuition was $38,119 at a public medical school, for a student paying in-state tuition, fees and health insurance during the 2018–2019 academic year.

When Foster was considering the merits of UC against another school to which he was accepted, the fact that he was able to gain in-state tuition was key.

“As an applicant who was accepted to all out-of-state programs, cost of attendance was front of mind for me,” he said. “One of the unique benefits of attending UC was the ability to reclassify as an in-state resident while in medical school. This represented a significant savings compared to other out-of-state options.
“Attending a more affordable medical school keeps your options open,” Foster said. “It’s hard to seriously consider entering a less lucrative specialty, for example, when you’re worried about your ability to pay off a mountain of student loan debt.”

Make sure you’re not overlooking these key sources of medical school scholarship funding.

What daily life is like at the medical school

Nobody is more in the know than medical students currently attending a given medical school. During your campus visit for an interview, it’s wise to speak with them to learn what life is like in the program and whether it aligns with your priorities.

Now pursuing an MD-PhD at the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine, Drayton Harvey was already married before he began medical school, so he knew work-life balance would be important. Harvey said most schools trumpeted the balance they allow for students, but he found it wisest to hear it from the source.

“I had some frank discussions with students about what your average week looks like,” he said. “What activities do you participate in outside the classroom? How much time per week do you have to do that and how much time per week do you spend on class related activities? That gave me the better picture of what student life looks like at an institution.”

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to get medical school off to a strong start with help from the AMA.