

The 11 factors that influence med student specialty choice

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What motivates medical students to pursue a certain career path? The answers are both complex and individualized.

Recent data on specialty choice looks at the question from a broad vantage point. The Association of American Medical Colleges 2019 Graduation Questionnaire asked students why they chose a specialty. The 16,000 plus respondents offered insight on how influential various factors were in choosing their specialty.

For those considering their steps after medical school, FREIDA's Specialty Guide—and corresponding series of videos offering expert insight on specialty choice—provides a clear, approachable overview of medical specialties and subspecialties and can help you choose a career path. It's designed to simplify medical students' specialty selection process, highlight major specialties, detail training information and provide access to related association information.

Learn about the right time to choose a medical specialty.

Top factors

A career path is a matter of personal preference and interest. In ranking 11 factors that influence specialty choice, student respondents made that very clear.

When asked about the importance of a specialty's "fit with personality, interests, and skills," 87 % of respondents indicated that it had a "strong influence." Similarly, "content of specialty" was selected by 83% of respondents as having a strong influence. The third most frequently cited strong influence on specialty choice by 2019 graduates was "role model influence" at 50%.

In each of the past five years, according to the AAMC, personal fit, content and role modeling were the top three choices among medical school graduates.

Learn if residency training length should influence specialty choice.

All 11 factors

Combining the factors that either a strong or moderate influence the entire list reads:

- | Personality fit—ranked as a moderate or strong influence on specialty choice by 99% of respondents.
- | Specialty content—98%.
- | Role model influence—81%.
- | Work/life balance—77%.
- | Fellowship training options—61%.
- | Future family plans—61%.
- | Income expectations—48%.
- | Length of residency—43%
- | Competitiveness of specialty—39%.
- | Expectations of family—29%
- | Education debt—22%.

Other findings

| While educational debt was the least influential factor, there are indicators that more students are factoring it into their decision. According to a report on students' responses "the portion of 2019 graduates who said that the level of education debt had a strong (6.5%) or moderate (15.4%) influence on their specialty choice was 21.8%, a slight increase over the 21.3%. Expectation of future earnings is a stronger factor in deciding specialty.

In terms of the resources students used to research their specialty, the top picks among student respondents were advising and mentoring, which 47% of respondents found "very useful" and 27% found moderately useful; and participation in in-house and extramural electives—very useful for 44% and moderately useful for 26%.