What it’s like to specialize in endocrinology: Shadowing Dr. Correa

FEB 11, 2021

Staff News Writer

As a medical student, do you ever wonder what it’s like to specialize in preventive medicine? Meet AMA member Ricardo Correa, MD, an endocrinologist and a featured physician in the AMA’s “Shadow Me” Specialty Series, which offers advice directly from physicians about life in their specialties. Check out his insights to help determine whether a career in endocrinology might be a good fit for you.

The AMA's Specialty Guide simplifies medical students' specialty selection process, highlights major specialties, details training information, and provides access to related association information. It is produced by FREIDA™, the AMA Residency & Fellowship Database®, which allows you to search for a residency or fellowship from more than 12,000 programs—all accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

Learn more with the AMA about the medical specialty of endocrinology.

“Shadowing” Dr. Correa (@drricardocorrea)
Specialty: Endocrinology.

Practice setting: Academic and VA hospital.

Employment type: Employed by a university and veteran hospital in Phoenix.

Years in practice: Five.

A typical day and week in my practice: My typical day starts with walking early in the morning as part of my daily exercise. Then I go to work where I divide my time into clinical, research activities and education (between staffing trainees, giving lectures to medical student and the administration of the fellowship program). Then I go back home to have some organizational meetings and spend the rest of my time with my family and relax.

In a typical week, I usually have some days where I have my own clinic and staff the fellow’s clinic other days. There is part of my week that I dedicate to my research and write grants and manuscripts. In addition, I dedicate between 1.5–2 days for the fellowship program, my activities to diversity and inclusion and an extra half day to teach medical students. During the weekend, I volunteer some hours in an underserved clinic where I worked as the medical director. One weekend a month, I also go to my military drill as per my U.S. Army Reserve responsibilities.

The most challenging and rewarding aspects of endocrinology: Endocrinology is the perfect combination between science and medicine. Many of our patients, if we find out that they have a hormonal abnormality, we are able to replace them and help the patient feel excellent. The most challenging aspect of my patient population is that we deal with chronic conditions like diabetes and sometimes patients don’t like to follow our recommendation, so we need to increase medication. Another challenging thing is that diabetic medication is expensive, and some patients cannot afford
them. You feel frustrated when this happens.

The most rewarding aspect of endocrinology is many things. Seeing how you can change the life of a patient because you are treating their condition has no price. Dealing with underrepresented minorities and making them feel good and providing them the best care for their chronic condition is very special for me. Discovering new ways to manage patients through research is also very rewarding in my life.

**How life in endocrinology has been affected by the global pandemic:** We moved to telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a positive and negative aspect of this. The positive is that the patients who have a chronic condition like diabetes and obesity are more compliant with the appointment. This translates to us seeing them more frequently, plus they are compliant with the medication.

The negative side is that more complex conditions that need to be seen in person sometimes are not coming in and we don’t do a full physical exam. In the area of teaching, the learning has changed because the fellows don’t have the opportunity to see all the patients face-to-face.

**The long-term impact the pandemic will have on endocrinology:** The impact is that we are now doing telemedicine. I always see the good part of everything and for us, having telemedicine is very beneficial for the patients with diabetes and obesity because they are more compliant with the appointment and the treatment. Also, some of the social determinants of health can be addressed during the telemedicine visit and we are doing that. I see that the future will be a mix of telemedicine and face-to-face visits.

**Three adjectives to describe the typical endocrinologist:** Creative, passionate and caring.

**How my lifestyle matches, or differs from, what I had envisioned:** The life that I have as an endocrinologist, scientist and educator is what I envisioned when I was in medical school. I have time to make change not only for my patients but also to the population near my area, in the country and to the next generation of physicians. My work-life balance is fine because I have time that I dedicate to my family. I am very happy because I am doing what I really like and that makes my work very easy.

**Skills every physician in training should have for endocrinology but won’t be tested for on the board exam:** The most important skill that trainees should have for this specialty is being creative. It is about always trying to find the answer to a problem as well as correlating symptoms with laboratory and imaging work, making a diagnosis and finally giving them the most appropriate treatment. Hormonal world is not an easy world. There are many things that are difficult to make a diagnosis and many symptoms that overlap. Being creative and always thinking outside the box will need to be a “must” for the ones that are thinking about endocrinology.
One question physicians in training should ask themselves before pursuing endocrinology:
The questions that you should ask yourself if you are planning to come to endocrinology are:

- Do you want to have a good work-life balance?
- Do you like to think outside the box?
- Do you like correlation between research and medicine?
- Do you want to change your patient or change a population?

If you answer yes to the questions above, you are ready to become an endocrinologist.

Books every medical student interested in endocrinology should be reading: The two most important books of endocrinology cover the basic concept of endocrinology:

- Williams Textbook of Endocrinology, by Shlomo Melmed, MB, ChB, Kenneth S. Polonsky, MD, P. Reed Larsen, MD, and Henry M. Kronenberg, MD. This is the bible of endocrinology.
- Basic and Clinical Endocrinology, by Francis S Greenspan, MD. It gives you a full perspective of the endocrine world.

The online resource students interested in endocrinology should follow: Endotext—it is an online book that covers the entire endocrine world and is free. I always look for any of the common conditions in the best evidence-based medicine source which is Dynamed. Many of the answers for endocrinology can be found there. The amazing thing is that everything that comes from research has been appraised and they give you the level of evidence.

On social media, there are several accounts including @ypsendo, @endojournalclub and @medscapeendo that provide information about endocrinology. Finally, I follow the Endocrine Society, Endocrine News, American Association of Clinical Endocrinology, American Diabetes Association, American Thyroid Association, and American Society for Bone and Mineral Research on social media because they all really care about education and promote endocrine learning.

Quick insights I would give students who are considering endocrinology: Endocrinology is a fascinating world. You can achieve many goals in your life. You can be an expert clinician, an amazing scientist and an outstanding educator. You can discover things that will change the future of medicine. I really recommend everyone that has an interest in endocrinology to explore the possibility. We need a lot more people like all of you. If you have any questions, I am available to talk to all of you about this.

Mantra or song to describe life in endocrinology: “Puedes llegar,” (You can make it) by Gloria Stefan.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/residents-students/specialty-profiles/what-it-s-specialize-endocrinology-shadowing-dr-correa
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