

How to reflect pandemic experiences on medical school applications

JUL 1, 2021

Brendan Murphy

News Writer

Every American has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. For medical school applicants acknowledging that and how it may have shaped your application is central to forming a well-rounded applicant portfolio.

Ngozi F. Anachebe, MD is associate dean for admissions and student affairs at Morehouse School of Medicine, one of the 37 member schools in the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium. She offered her insight on how medical students should frame their pandemic experiences on their medical school application.

Be personal

Each medical school application is going to include a personal statement—most will also include some sort of essay-type prompt on a secondary application. Dr. Anachebe recommends that you follow through on what the essay claims to be—personal—and speak to your unique experiences during the pandemic.

“Being able to articulate how COVID affected them is important for these classes [of applicants],” Dr. Anachebe said. “For some it may be that they didn’t have jobs or lacked access to wi-fi. Experience will vary, it’s not a one-size-fits all.”

Speak about what you know

Shadowing and volunteer experiences were limited during the pandemic, and admissions offices are aware of that. Still, the baseline question of why you want to work as a physician will be at the center

of your application and certainly will come up during the interview process.

“Some of them may not have set foot on any medical facility other than as a patient or as someone who accompanied a family member,” Dr. Anachebe said. “And that’s OK, but they need to be able to describe in their own words what they feel being a physician is like. That may be from second-hand experience.”

Understand how COVID-19 changed things

Almost every medical school has some sort of community service orientation expressed in its mission statement. Seeing how COVID-19 impacted certain communities, particularly those in marginalized population, may have influenced your decision to apply to medical school. Articulate what you witnessed and why it motivated you.

“Many people saw how their communities or families were impacted by the virus and they want to be part of the solution,” Dr. Anachebe said. “Especially applicants from underserved communities. You may have even lost loved ones or seen your surrounding community decimated.”

In addition to your personal experiences, understanding how systemic inequities contributed to the pandemic is also an important piece of knowledge to convey.

“So many of these people who were most affected worked blue-collar jobs and are on the front lines with the virus,” Dr. Anachebe said.

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.