

Choosing a specialty? Explore these key considerations

MAY 4, 2022

Brendan Murphy

Senior News Writer

Of all the decisions you make as a medical student, the one that will likely shape your career the most is picking a physician specialty, and that choice is one which has many facets.

The AMA has covered the topic in great depth over the years, covering questions such as how to get started, how medical students go about making their selection, and the question of whether to apply to more than one specialty. Here are some key insights medical students should take note of as they begin to hone their specialty choice.

1 When is the right time to choose your physician specialty

From pre-clinical years through core clerkships and into away rotations, all your medical school experiences offer valuable insight on what you may want to do with your physician future.

2 Key questions to help you get started in choosing a physician specialty

For those at the early stages of considering their future specialty, questions such as whether they want to pursue a procedural specialty are a jumping off point for narrowing the specialty option.

3 For a practical way to pick your physician specialty, study the data

Finding the right physician specialty is a matter of knowing what you want to do, but it's also about knowing where you are wanted. Pursuing a medical or surgical specialty because of perceived prestige or competitiveness doesn't make for a fulfilling career. It also might not make for a match.

4 Top specialties with the most medical residency positions

Among the factors that can contribute to physician specialty choice is the magnitude of opportunity, as detailed in this unique view of program data from FREIDA™, the AMA Residency & Fellowship Database.

5 Physician specialty choice: Should residency training length matter?

The duration of training is all that stands between a physician and practice. For those selecting a specialty, the length of that training may be a factor—though experts seem to agree that's unlikely to be a sole or deciding factor on specialty choice.

6 The factors that influence medical students' specialty choice

What motivates medical students to pursue a certain career path? The answers are both complex and individualized. Data on physician specialty choice looks at the question from a broad vantage point.

7 What to know about applying to more than one physician specialty

When it comes to your future, it pays to be practical. In terms of applying to residency programs, that may mean diversifying your search to include more than one specialty.

What does that process entail?

8 Virtually shadow physicians from many different specialties

As a medical student, do you ever wonder what it's like in a particular specialty? Shadowing a doctor offers valuable insights to help determine whether a career in certain specialty is a good fit for you. Meet featured physicians in the AMA's "Shadow Me" Specialty Series, which offers advice directly from physicians about life in their specialties.

The AMA offers tools to aid you with your medical specialty choice. 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.