



COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Clinical Experience for Pre-Medical Students

Students interested in pursuing a medical profession and applying to medical schools should be aware of the importance of clinical experience. Not only does it provide insight into the daily regime of a healthcare professional, but also an opportunity for professional development. Medical school applicants will be asked about their previous clinical experiences in their application, making it crucial to locate opportunities that offer clinical exposure. Admissions directors stress the significance of clinical experience in order to expose students to the realities of medicine and ensure their interest in the profession.

Summer break provides a good time to participate in a program, internship, observership, or job to gain the experience you need to become an informed and prepared applicant for medical school. Many students spend 1-2 years following graduation as a “gap year” and may choose to explore clinical opportunities during this time. The average age to enter medical school is 24 years.

Please note that the opportunities listed below are simply suggestions and by no means required. Additionally, this list is not exhaustive. For additional information, visit the Cornell Exploration Center or speak to a Pre-Health Advisor.

Healthcare Professional Shadowing

Shadowing a Physician:

Shadowing a physician, otherwise known as a student or medical observership, is an excellent opportunity to gain clinical experience as well as insight into the medical profession. If possible, try to identify and apply to hospitals and private practices that have established shadowing programs. It is important to note that some physicians may not have established shadowing programs but may still be open to having students participate in shadowing. In this case, it may be useful to contact these physicians directly and ask to be considered for a shadowing opportunity. Consider reaching out to your own pediatrician or family doctor.

In general, most private practices have more lenient rules concerning student observerships, so it may be useful when starting out your search to begin with a private clinic rather than a hospital. In addition, Cornell alumni are excellent resources to reach out to and speak to about their own experiences as well as obtain advice for opportunities for undergraduates. Students can contact their college's Alumni Affairs Office to inquire about contact information for professionals in their field of interest. Students may also search local listings for physicians in their area for shadowing opportunities.

When contacting physicians, it may be best to call their practices, as many physicians choose not to list their personal email online. When calling, it is important to understand who you may be speaking to: receptionists, assistants, nurses, physician assistants, other physicians, or the physician you are looking for may answer your call. Begin by introducing yourself and explaining the reason for your call. If the particular clinic or practice has a restriction against shadowing opportunities, respectfully inquire to speak with the physician about recommendations for other places that may offer student shadowing positions. Keep any correspondence whether through email or phone conversations concise to be respectful of the physician's time.

If accepted into a shadowing position, it may be useful to read about HIPPA, the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, in order to understand the responsibilities of an observer. Any personal and medical information that an observer may encounter throughout the duration of their shadowing experience is protected under federal law and should never be discussed outside of the medical setting. Patient confidentiality is one of the most important responsibilities to keep in mind when shadowing and should be respected at all times.

Prior to shadowing, it may be useful to plan attire in advance. Most medical offices will require business casual wear, with closed toed shoes that are comfortable to walk in. Physicians spend a majority of their time on their feet and closed-toed shoes are necessary to prevent injuries to the feet and contamination from fluids.

During the observership, observers should also keep in mind that under no circumstances should they enter a patient's room without the approval of a healthcare provider. Physicians will invite observers into a patient's room and introduce him/her to the patient, asking for their consent. Throughout the duration of the shadowing experience, it is also possible that



COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Clinical Experience for Pre-Medical Students

physicians will ask observers to wait outside of certain patients rooms. Physicians who are familiar with their patients will be able to identify which patients may or may not be comfortable with having an observer in the room.

It is important to ask questions when accompanying a physician. Healthcare professionals appreciate interest in their field and as a student, it is essential to demonstrate a willingness to learn. Shadowing experiences are meant to serve as a learning experience, and it is useful to think of several questions ahead of time. Following the completion of a shadowing experience, remember to write a thank you card and send it to the physician. The note should convey both gratitude as well as a brief description of what you have learned as an observer.

Shadowing physicians is an invaluable and exciting experience for students interested in a career in healthcare. Students will gain a more in depth understanding of the career field as well as specialty-specific knowledge from the observership. It offers students the opportunity to network with professionals as well as to further explore a particular interest in the field of medicine.

Internship Programs

For Clinical Internship Program opportunities please refer to the Career Exploration Center's Summer Opportunities in Health resource.

Cornell Specific Programs

Cornell Urban Semester

This pre-professional program allows Cornell students from any major to explore the healthcare career field through shadowing opportunities with physicians, community service projects, and academic seminars. Students can take advantage of the diverse demographic that New York City offers in order to gain a stronger understanding of medicine and professionalism. Participants will earn academic credit for the courses they take as part of the program, which include seminars, group discussions and ethnographic field work. Through collaborations with New York Presbyterian Hospital, Woodhull Hospital, and other local New York City hospitals, students will experience the culture of medicine and explore their specific field of interest. All undergraduate students are encouraged to apply.

Cornell Externship

The Externship program matches sophomores, juniors, and seniors with professionals in their field of interest for a brief externship over Winter Break. As a student interested in a medical career, the Externship program may provide the opportunity to speak with or shadow physicians in a specialty area of interest that students may be interested in, but are unsure/unfamiliar with and would like to learn more about. The program seeks to encourage Cornell undergraduates to explore their career options, and expose them to the daily responsibilities and routines of healthcare professionals.

Cornell Fresh Program:

The FRESH program is a similar externship program that specializes in matching first year students to healthcare professionals in the field of their interest. For more information visit your college's Career Center or the University's Career Services Center in Barnes hall.

Cornell Patient Care Advocate Team Program (PCAT):

Students who are interested in gaining in-hospital experience should apply to the PCAT program offered in conjunction with Cayuga Medical Center each semester. This opportunity combines volunteering experience and leadership development seminars. Applicants can choose to participate in an Emergency Department Unit or In-Patient unit as a volunteer to provide patients comfort and advocacy. Additionally, students get the chance to support medical staff. This experience will provide students with exposure to real-world hospital and patient care. Accepted applicants will be responsible for one 3-hour shift per week, as well as monthly seminars.

Community Health Professionals Mentorship Program



COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Clinical Experience for Pre-Medical Students

This program is offered each fall and spring to Cornell Undergraduates interested in careers in healthcare and wellness. Students can participate in a mentorship with a Tompkins County health care provider, such as a pharmacist, physical therapist, physician, dentist, nurse practitioner, and public health administrator. Additionally, the program includes a shadowing component at an integrated health practice as well as at Cayuga Medical Center. This opportunity gives selected Cornell students the chance to observe the daily realities of healthcare and wellness professions.

Cornell Elderly Partnership (CEP)

For students interested in geriatrics, there is the opportunity to volunteer in local nursing homes. CEP provides weekly transportation to local nursing homes in the community. Volunteers participate in activities to engage the residents of the nursing homes and improve aspects of the residents' mental, emotional, and physical health. Through volunteering with elderly individuals, students may also indirectly gain exposure to geriatric medicine as well as palliative care.

Health Care Employment Opportunity

Lifeguard (Summer/Full Time):

Students who may be interested in becoming a healthcare provider may find an introductory opportunity serving as a lifeguard. The Red Cross allows individuals fifteen years and older to enroll in lifeguard certification courses which include training in First Aid, CPR, and AED skills in addition to water-safety specific skills. The skill-set and experiences obtained from this position provide an opportunity to learn and practice patient-provider interactions.

EMT Certification (Summer/Full Time):

For students interested in gaining clinical exposure, obtaining an Emergency Medical Technician certification and joining an Emergency Medical Service Agency will provide useful opportunity to learn about the healthcare experience. It is important to note that students who only have first responder medicine experience should also look into in-hospital or in-office clinical experience to ensure a thorough understanding of the medical profession. To become a certified EMT, a student must first enroll in a certification course. The class structure may vary depending on location, but students should expect to dedicate at least 200 hours to the completing the course.. This includes lectures, homework, clinical practice, emergency room shadowing, and ambulance ride-alongs. Joining an EMS Agency allows for pre-med students to utilize hands-on medical skills in a clinical setting as a first responder. Depending on the agency, some may require application for employment but others may be composed of volunteers. Look into your local agency for more details concerning the time commitment and prerequisites for working as an EMT.

Summer Camp Medical Director (Summer)

Students with healthcare certifications, specifically EMTs, are eligible to serve as the Medical Director of a summer camp or program. These programs require Medical Directors to oversee and ensure the health and wellbeing of all participants. Responsibilities may include managing medical forms and medication, as well as handling all reported instances of illness and injury. Students who are interested in working with children should look into employment opportunities within summer programs and camps.

Summer Camp Counselor (Summer)

Premedical students may opt to work or volunteer as counselors at a summer camp. Many camps cater to specific groups, such as children with special needs or children with certain illnesses. For example, Camp Wannaklot is a camp for children with bleeding disorders. These programs provide an opportunity for students to get involved with a specific cause that they may be passionate about and assist in making the children's experiences at the camp enjoyable. This provides clinical experience working directly with children as well as exposure to certain medical or psychological conditions.

Medical Administrative Assistant (Summer/Full-time)

An administrative assistant within an outpatient clinic or a private practice will have a variety of documentation and clerical responsibilities. However, this position provides an opportunity to interact with patients and establish the necessary social skills to succeed as a healthcare practitioner. Depending on the environment, this position will require the employee to organize medical records, check patients in, file patient history and insurance forms, as well as field phone calls from



COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Clinical Experience for Pre-Medical Students

patients when the physician is in with other patients. In an outpatient clinic, the responsibilities may extend to walking patients to their respective treatment rooms. Students should look to their local outpatient clinics as well as private practices for any position openings.

Medical Scribe (Full-time)

With the implementation of Electronic Health Records (EHR) in hospitals nationwide, physician responsibilities for documentation and clerical work have grown drastically. In order to maintain the focus on patient care and interaction, many physicians are turning to Medical Scribe services. A Medical Scribe serves as a personal assistant to the physician – performing documentation for the EHR, gathering patient information, and partnering with the physician to deliver efficient patient care. For students interested in pursuing a career in healthcare, this opportunity offers one-on-one collaboration with a physician, and is unprecedented in its level of exposure to clinical medicine in practice. Undergraduate students are eligible to undergo training and work as a medical scribe. This is a full time position often pursued by students following graduation.

Home Health Aid (Full-time)

Certified home health aides give personal care to physically or mentally ill patients in need of assistance with the daily activities of living. As a home health aid, you would work under the supervision of a licensed medical professional, typically a nurse. This provides students with patient care experience and an opportunity to interact with other medical professionals. To become certified, students would need to attend health aide certificate programs, which are offered by many community colleges and take a year or less to complete. These courses provide instruction on basic patient care skills, CPR certification, and medical terminology. Additionally, students must pass an exam given by the National Association of Home Care and Hospice to receive their certification.

Nurses Aid/Nursing Assistant (Full-time)

Nursing assistants work in nursing homes, hospice, hospitals, as well as other healthcare settings. They are supervised by registered nurses and assist in performing daily tasks for patients as well as taking vitals. The position requires daily contact with patients which would offer extensive patient care experience. Students can enroll in accredited nursing assistant training programs in order to be certified. Upon completion of the program, a state competency exam is needed to become certified.