

# FINDING YOUR WAY IN MEDICINE

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# MY BACKGROUND

- Born and raised in India and the US
- Emory University '10 – studied creative writing, biology
- Harvard Medical School '15
- Harvard Business School '15
- Residency in IM at the Univ of Michigan '18
- Faculty at Cornell – part-time hospitalist, and part-time in the division of healthcare innovation and delivery science at the AMC



# HIGH SCHOOL

- Start thinking about the future
- When picking extra-curriculars, have an eye towards thinking about what you enjoy and what you're good at. It's not just about checking some boxes to fill out your resume!

## SOME IDEAS

- Summer research at your local college
- Congressional aide at the State level
- Policy aide at your local public health dept
- Global health work (find an opportunity in India!)
- Volunteer work at the hospital
- Something completely different!! I did a humanities program (fully-paid for on a merit scholarship) at the Univ of Michigan, and it was the BEST experience.

# COLLEGE

- Strongly recommend making a 4 year plan your first week of college.
- Figure out the opportunities on campus that speak to you, classes or majors you think you might be interested in, and map it out.
- Don't be intimidated. Plans are just blueprints, they can change as you and your interests evolve.
- Some people are more type A than others. But don't view basic planning as something "intense" that you can't partake in because you are "discovering yourself".

## EXAMPLE OF A PLAN

Time Block	Classes	Activities
Semester 1	Bio 1, Chem 1, English, Spanish 1	School newspaper Science magazine Garba team
Semester 2	Bio 2, Chem 2, History 101, Spanish 2	
Summer 1		Study abroad in England
Semester 3		
Semester 4		
Summer 2		Research at NIH
		Take the MCAT

# EXPLORE MEDICINE

- Not all colleges do a great job of exposing students to the breadth of opportunities within medicine, so be proactive.
- It's not just clinical medicine, private-practice
- There are intersections with law, ethics, history, policy, research (basic, clinical, translational, health services), advocacy, politics, administration, pharma, medtech, VC/PE, journalism, global health...
- If any of these cross-currents catches your interest, be relentless about finding role models who are on those paths, and asking them how they got there.

## SOME THOUGHTS

- Don't pick a science major just for the sake of it. Medical schools honestly don't care what you major in, as long as you're passionate about it.
- Consider tailoring your activities and summer experiences to your classwork – you are weaving a coherent narrative about yourself.
- If you are interested in political sci/ history, become a part of the Young Democrats on campus, work as a congressional aide in the summer or at a policy thinktank, etc etc – this is coherent!
- Majoring in sociology, being a part of a garba team, being a medical scribe in the summer – this is all decent, but not necessarily coherent.

## A FEW FACTS

- Grades are important. Don't let your extracurriculars overwhelm your ability to stay on top of these.
- I'm honestly not sure what the right MCAT score is for your target school. Even at HMS, I knew folks who scored as low as a 28. But they had a compelling narrative!
- Make sure you actually develop relationships with the professors who will write you recommendation letters. It is suboptimal to ask the professor who taught you intro Bio (in a class of 150) to write you a letter if you've never been to office hours, never ask questions in class, never ask for career advice, don't offer to TA the following year etc etc.

## RANDOM ADVICE

- Don't look sideways, look ahead.
- Some activities are the classic college activities – being in a frat, being part of an Indian dance team, etc. They may be a ton of fun, but do things in moderation.
- If your dance team requires a commitment of 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, and you are unable to literally do any other extracurricular as a result, maybe just do it for a year.
- If you decide to major in engineering, but your frat has a party every Thurs, Fri, Sat – maybe don't live in the frat house, and be selective about what you attend.

## CAVEATS

- What to do with any “deficiencies” in your experience? Average grades, lack of clinical experience (shadowing, research), time off from school (due to mental health etc).
- BE HONEST
- Do not underestimate the power of spin!
- Feel free to take a year or 2 after college making up for any perceived inadequacies. It’s a long road, there’s no rush. Focus on the journey, and feeling your best.

# APPLYING TO SCHOOLS

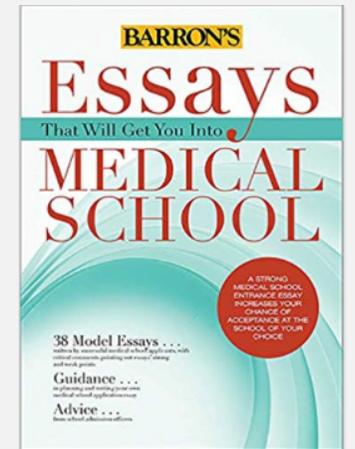
- You will have to pick the # and range of schools to apply to based on your strength as a candidate AND your risk tolerance.
- My risk tolerance is low – I applied to 35 schools!
- It was worth it to me to just throw in those extra applications NOW rather than not get in to my target schools and spend a year regretting that level of confidence.
- Ask your career/ guidance counselors about how strong of a candidate you are. Seek their input early and often.

## IF YOU ARE AN INTN'L APPLICANT

- I was an international applicant! At the time, I was still on an H-4 visa (dependent on my parents' H1 visas).
- Do your research. Several state schools are upfront that they do not have funding to subsidize you (as they cannot apply federal funds towards you).
- For me, that meant all of the Univ of California schools were OUT.
- Other schools have onerous financial requirements. Ex: putting 4 years of tuition money into escrow. Ex: Hopkins
- I didn't waste money applying to these places.

# YOUR ESSAY

- Put some real thought into it.
- This is your chance to contextualize all of your choices – don't just rehash your resume.
- I wrote the first draft over a spring weekend my junior year. Then tucked it away for 2 months, before taking it out again in May, and seeing how I felt about it
- Consider buying a book of example essays – easily available on Amazon
- Having a smart, polished, lyrical essay is EVERYTHING.



# INTERVIEWING

- Practice, practice, practice
- I downloaded a list of possible questions (like 75) from somewhere on the internet, and actually typed out answers.
- Then I read them out loud, looked in the mirror and practiced them, had a friend do a mock interview with me.
- Went to the career center – they will videotape you while you interview, and you can see what you do from an unconscious body language standpoint.

## POST-INTERVIEW

- Send thank you emails. I did actual cards, but that's probably passe now. Be specific about what you appreciated in your conversation with the interviewer, so they remember you better.
- Reflect on your visit. Take notes, you will definitely forget later on.
  - Did you have any gut feelings about the place? Did you vibe with the students? Is the geography an issue? Are there specific opportunities at particular schools that interest you – perhaps a strong global health program, or star faculty, or the possibility of a dual degree. Look at what other folks have said on sites like StudentDoctor (but always take their reviews with a grain of salt.

## END OF THE ROAD

- Breathe. You're done! Now you wait to get in somewhere.
- Some places are rolling – UVA, Emory, Sinai, Northwestern.
- Others will only let you know in mid-March – Stanford, Harvard
- Enjoy your senior year. Travel. Do an honors thesis.

## SUMMER BEFORE YOU START

- Read books that give you a taste for healthcare – books by Atul Gawande, Sandeep Jauhar, Siddhartha Mukherjee, Oliver Sacks, Rafael Campo, Paul Kalanithi, Samuel Shem
- If you have any long trips on your agenda – do them now! There is always less time than you think in medical school.
- If you are at all considering a dual degree, go ahead and get the GRE/GMAT out of the way this summer. They are really not hard at all, and you can easily get this done.
- Relax!

# NAVIGATING MED SCHOOL

- If you are as undecided as I was at the start of med school, be a sponge and soak it all in.
- Go to all guest lectures, lunch talks, journal clubs. Befriend professors, and older students/ residents.
- If your school offers electives on management/policy, audit them.
- Read NEJM, JAMA every month – if not these, pick a journal and at least skim the headlines regularly. Make a note of what interests you.
- The summer after first year – pick an internship or research project carefully. This may be the last large block of time you ever have, so don't throw it away.

## SHOULD YOU DO A 5<sup>TH</sup> YEAR?

- This is the norm in a lot of top schools – pursue a research project in depth, a second degree, work at the NIH etc – but is slowly being phased out.
- Lots of schools are pursuing an abbreviated pre-clinical curriculum in order to give you extra time to do research at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> year.
- I pursued an MBA at Harvard – and would not trade this for ALL THE WORLD.
- Even more than just the opportunities/ learning/ experiences – it helped me fight a sense of burnout, and realize how much I missed clinical medicine.

## PICKING A FIELD

- We may have a pre-conception of what we would want to do before coming to medical school.
- This might be influenced by our family, notions of what is 'reputable' or lucrative, or what you think might interest you.
- Stay open-minded.
- Be pragmatic – if you think your career might be at an intersection like we previously discussed, you might not have the bandwidth to be a subspecialist. Can you afford to schedule in continuity with patients, or would shift work be better?
- When you see mentors in your field, what kinds of trade-offs have they made?
- If you do what you do well, the money will follow.

## EXTRA-CLINICAL WORK

- Obviously, research.
- Publications, for better or worse, are currency in academic medicine
- But also consider internships at start-ups, pharma, VC. Found a start-up. Write for a television show. Dabble in telemedicine, AI, robotics.
- Medical humanities. Write for magazines, HuffPo, Scientific American, Medscape. Create a coalition of students/ faculty at your school, and grow this field!
- Go to conferences. Even if you feel like a lemming in a big sea, go and soak it all in. Meet cool people.
- Ultimately, medicine is a small frat. Always remember the importance of networking

## CONTACT ME

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