

PREPARING FOR A CAREER **AS A PHYSICIAN**



By Dr. Deborah Bedor, CEO, College Admission Central

So, you are devoted to the field of healthcare, and you know that your college applications must speak to this devotion with the rigor of your academics, the empathy you exhibit through human-to-human interactions, and the immersive experiences you have sought out in the service of science and healing. There are many faces of healthcare. The first that come to mind are likely the physician and the nurse. But ineliminable to those callings are research

(for which you must learn how to observe, experiment, follow a hypothesis, communicate, and write science) and medical technology. Thanks to the contemporary confluence of science, medical practice, data science, machine learning, and molecular analysis, we are amid a revolution in med-tech and precision medicine. So, if your talents lie in Computer Science, AI, or Machine Learning, your work might one day be pivotal in predicting and solving healthcare conundrums.

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Within the boundaries of this article, we will concentrate on successful paths to take in high school for becoming a future physician. Nonetheless, much of the advice to follow will apply equally well to other healthcare career objectives.

The connective tissue among all fields of medicine is the desire to heal, and ultimately, that requires you to be as human-focused as you are disease-focused because, as Dr. William Osler (a founder of the internal medicine discipline) noted, *“Listen to your patient; he is telling you the diagnosis.”* So, although it will be useful to be able to code or review algorithmic output, using your mathematical and analytical skills, it will be just as important to develop your soft skills and intuition. Engage in hands-on activities before college to enhance both your bedside and “websites” manner.

More than a century ago, Louis Pasteur said, *“Chance favors only the prepared mind.”* He meant that sudden flashes of insight do not just happen—they’re the product of preparation. Intense preparation, therefore, is key to a successful and fulfilling medical career and to admission into the best schools that nurture young scholars towards such a career. Forward-thinking students who hope to pursue medicine will understand that the unique combination of patient interaction and science research is part and parcel of the same future—and having experience in both, obtained through shadowing, scribing, volunteering, medical missions, bench, or behavioral research, can be pivotal to a student’s early professional choices and acceptance to college.

THE BEST ACTIVITIES THAT PREPARE YOU FOR PRE-MEDICAL/HEALTHCARE COLLEGE APPLICATIONS:

1. Shadow: Shadow physicians over a one to two-year stretch, if possible. Ask questions not only about the rewards of the discipline but also about the dark side of medicine: how to address the needs of terminal patients; how physicians cope with feeling overworked; keeping up not only on medicine but on the technology required for use in medical practices; handling disgruntled patients; long hours that might keep them away from family, etc.

IMPORTANT: Journal, journal, journal so that you have cases to discuss, methods of diagnosis to compare, and human-to-human interactions to observe. All these components will find a place in your BS/MD essays (and there are many supplementary essays for such applications, so you will need material to write about).

2. Scribe: Working as a medical scribe is a meaningful way to interact with patients, observe a broad spectrum of medical treatments, and learn the process involved in keeping detailed medical records as well as the diverse roles of a healthcare staff.

3. Train as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT): An EMT provides emergency care to patients in need before they arrive at a hospital. They often work with fire departments and on ambulances, and although not medical professionals, they are trained to assess conditions, provide first aid and even life support when needed. In less than a year or 150 hours of coursework and training, a student can take the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) exam. This is valuable hands-on experience for a future pre-med.

4. Volunteer for the elderly in nursing homes or senior centers: This kind of engagement provides a way for you to have direct contact with seniors in need and uplift a life. Whether you are a musician, artist, storyteller, or a great listener, you can use your talents to develop creative programming and distraction from the quotidian routine of elder care.

5. Attend summer programs and conferences of like-minded students such as the National Academy of Future Physicians and Medical Scientists, NIH High School Summer Internship Program, BU Rise, or Penn Summer Academies.

YOU GET IN BY STANDING OUT!

Most advisors will recommend you become involved with the basic pre-med, science Olympiad, or HOSA clubs at school,



and, of course, those are valuable if only because you get to experience science and topics in healthcare amidst a like-minded group. However, taking up precious after-school time with the same clubs as every other student inspired to pursue medicine will make your college application look like everyone else's too. Why not differentiate?! For example, if you are an excellent writer, why not create a STEM Research Journal for your school, or develop a Speaker Series of notable physicians, or even a pop-up clinic with volunteer physicians, nurses, and social workers to serve the under-resourced in your community?

STRIVE FOR TOP GRADES, SCORES, AND RIGOROUS CHALLENGES

Your grades and test scores remain the gateway to a college major that relates to healthcare and, if you choose, medical school beyond. For students applying in the sciences, be sure that you have succeeded in the highest level of Biology, Chemistry, and Physics that your high school offers (AP or IB HL, or even college courses from community colleges). Strive to be an all-A student and be sure your math and science GPA is very high. That makes sense, right? If you are planning on joining an eminent profession of great scientists and physicians, participating in a life of learning and relearning through new lenses, and holding a patient's life in your hands, educational institutions want to be sure they are taking the very best minds and the hardest workers.

WHAT YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT COMBINED BS/MD PROGRAMS

For those students seeking acceptance to a direct-medical program (BS/MD) in college, i.e., a seven-or-eight-year medical course of study, let's look at how to prepare your volunteer and creative life to build a challenging and meaningful résumé and BS/MD application.

The BS/MD is the most competitive of all college programs. Make sure your grades are "A"s in the most advanced courses your school offers; BS/MD programs look for rigor of curriculum and academic success in all your subjects. Standardized test scores are still important. Make sure you score in the mid to high 700s on each part of the SAT or 34+ on each part of the ACT. The competition is serious.

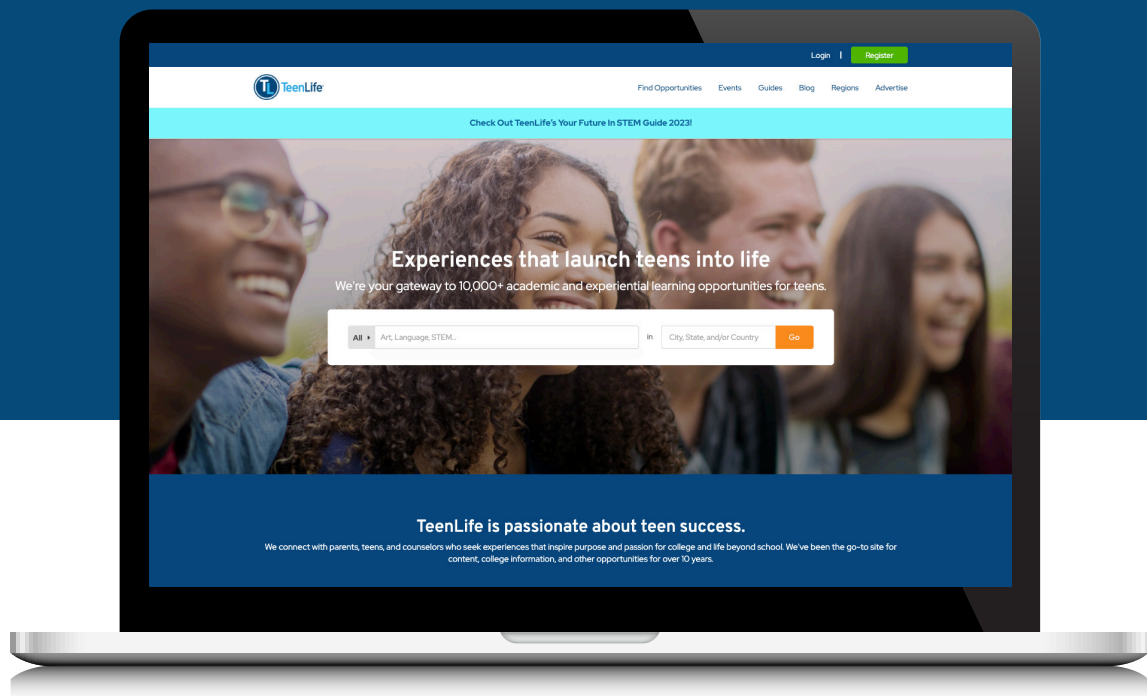
If possible, plan on spending some time in another country volunteering in clinics through a medical mission or in research labs. Diversity and global understanding have become important aspects of the BS/MD application.



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