

Fun Interview M&M's (Myths and Misconceptions)

Medical school applicants share misconceptions about the functions and nature of the medical school interview. Many applicants are convinced that their information was based on true stories which fully explained the success, or lack of success, of previous applicants. It is hoped that debunking some of these myths, in a spirit of fun, will reduce some of the anticipatory tension which surrounds preparation for the medical school interview.

MYTH #1: Only applicants dressed in black or navy blue suits and ties will be successful in gaining admission.

REALITY: It is important to dress appropriately, but it is certainly not necessary for everyone to arrive for the interview dressed in the same conservative uniform. I have wondered at times if there is a mail-order catalogue which is selling the medical school interview uniform to our nation's applicants. How is it possible for so many of them, men and women alike, to be dressed so similarly? Be yourself. Dress professionally but do not feel that you have to wear a black suit with a white shirt. I am NOT suggesting jeans, but there is nothing wrong with a gray suit with a pink tie.

MYTH #2: Never bother others by taking a school up on its offer to stay with medical school students overnight.

REALITY: Students volunteer to host applicants because they are genuinely interested in sharing information about their school and community. These student hosts are not coerced into offering a space on their couch. This is a great way to gain insight into a medical school. Be pleasant and polite and full of thanks, but do not stay in a hotel when you have a chance to get an inside guide!

MYTH #3: During the interview day speak only when spoken to and never ask unsolicited questions.

REALITY: The interview day should be full of a series of conversations and opportunities to get to know some interesting people and for the school's representatives to get to know you. Enjoy the day and approach your interviews with an open and engaging attitude.

MYTH #4: No one will ever really ask "why medicine as your career choice?"

REALITY: The answer to this question must be revealed in some way during the interview. If the response during the interview is "well, I don't really know," OR "I can't really put it into words," the committee response will be very clear: "NO!"

MYTH #5: One must be nice to the doctors and deans during the interview day but can "let you hair down" with the students and support staff.

REALITY: Committees can only assume that someone who is rude to secretaries and other students may respond to patients in the same manner. If you have to work so hard to be pleasant perhaps you could consider another career choice.

MYTH #6: During an interview never admit to having faced difficult experiences in life.

REALITY: Admission committees would much rather accept students who have learned from an experience of failure or frustration rather than someone who has yet to have this learning opportunity. Be straightforward about any difficulties and stress what you have learned from the experience which will ultimately make you a better physician.

MYTH #7: Never say “I don’t know anything about that subject.” Instead fake your way through a vague response and the interviewer will not notice.

REALITY: Just as a physician needs to say “I don’t know” at times, so does a medical school applicant. Be honest about the limits of your knowledge, perhaps express an interest in researching the answer after the interview, but never simply pretend to know something about an issue. This approach will be discovered.

MYTH #8: If an interviewer asks inappropriate questions during an interview, it is important not to tell anyone at the school since this might hurt one’s application.

REALITY: Committees are aware that even the most aggressive training programs for interviewers sometimes fail. If the school provides an ‘end of the day’ evaluation form, be honest and specific in discussing concerns. If no evaluation format is provided, appropriately share concerns with the Dean or Director of Admissions. Do not just pretend the inappropriate questions were not asked. The committee genuinely wants to get to know you and can best do this with a fair interview process.

MYTH #9: In preparation for the interview carefully practice “canned” answers for any possible questions.

REALITY: Remember the ideal interview is a conversation. There is nothing more frustrating for an interviewer than talking with a candidate who is simply responding to specific questions with general, rehearsed answers. Engage in the conversation and enjoy the opportunity to discuss your vision and goals.

Adapted from:

The University of Chicago Health Professions Handbook, The Office of the Dean of Students in the College. and Newsletter of the Central Association of Advisors for the Health Professions by Sylvia Robertson, Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid, Pritzker School of Medicine.