

THE ROAD TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

Becoming a physician normally requires 10 to 12 years after graduation from high school. Four years are required for completion of a premedical curriculum at an undergraduate college or university such as UCA. An additional four years are spent in medical school (two years of basic medical sciences followed by two years of clinical study). The period of internship or residency depends on the degree of specialization desired. What should be done during the undergraduate years to prepare for medical school?

The Medical School at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences has specific course requirements for Biology (2 semesters), General Chemistry (2 semesters), Organic Chemistry (2 semesters), Physics (2 semesters), Mathematics (2 semesters) and English (3 semesters -- which may include Speech). Requirements at other medical schools may vary slightly, but these courses are generally considered to be a minimum basis for success in medical school. You may major in whatever you choose so long as you complete at least the courses listed above. Other courses such as biochemistry, microbiology, cell biology, anatomy and physiology, embryology and histology will also be helpful. The medical school wishes to attract students with wide interests, so you should enroll in a variety of liberal arts courses and participate in extracurricular activities as well. Some types of work experience may be helpful.

Acceptance into medical school is based primarily on four criteria:

- 1) UNDERGRADUATE RECORD--The minimum acceptable GPA generally is around 3.40. The higher the better, especially in science, but by no means is a 4.0 required. However, it is important to get off to a good start in college coursework; more A's than B's with only an occasional C will be required for success.
- 2) MCAT--The Medical College Admissions Test is more a test of skills than memory. Average or better scores in each of the areas of the exam are generally required for admission to medical school. The MCAT is normally taken during the spring of the junior year and may be repeated in the following fall. If the exam is taken more than once, UAMS averages the scores. To prepare, you should take coursework that provides you the opportunity for analytical and synthetic thinking. It is also important to be able to write logically and coherently. Commercial prep courses for the MCAT are available.
- 3) INTERVIEW--This is generally not a major stumbling block; you should relax and be yourself.
- 4) RECOMMENDATION--The Premedical Advisory Committee provides a recommendation based on your college record and a summary of evaluations provided by faculty and others who know you best.

Of those who plan for medical school and fail to attain that goal, the majority fail during their first year of undergraduate school. Becoming a physician requires a strong commitment to learning and to personal development, and many are discouraged when confronted with the magnitude of that commitment. Fortunately, the courses in the premed core are appropriate for a number of other career options.