

## THE INTERVIEW

When the letter arrives inviting you to your first health professions school interview, you have every reason to be exhilarated. Your application and transcripts have been carefully scrutinized and the reviewer(s) have deemed you to be an acceptable candidate for admission. **Read** the instructions that come with the invitation to the interview very carefully and respond promptly.

The interview is a two-way process. Not only is it your single most important opportunity to express or explain yourself to the admission committee, but also it is your opportunity to learn something about the institution firsthand. It provides you the opportunity to ask questions about the institution's programs and faculty and to tour the facilities. You can gain information that might not be available in the institution's literature and other public documents.

This is also the institution's opportunity to recruit you. Not all health professions schools use an interview, but those that do, use it to assess a number of personal qualities deemed necessary for successful academic progress and/or professional practice. Receiving an invitation to interview does not mean, however, that you are assured an acceptance. Regard the interview as an opportunity to present yourself as a "real" person with real goals and aspirations. The interview provides the admission committee, through its representative(s), with the opportunity to meet you, verify your credentials and supplement its knowledge of you. The admission committee seeks to clarify your biographical information, residency, transcripts, and any other data submitted in your written application materials. The interview is also used to obtain explanations and insight into any problems encountered with your application. For example, your grades for one semester may have fallen noticeably. If this situation has not been thoroughly explained in your application, the committee may inquire about it. It is also a chance for you to clarify any potential misunderstandings, for example, a possible health or family problem, physical or mental. You might have felt uncomfortable writing about these circumstances. Nevertheless, the interview gives you an opportunity to discuss your situation and respond to questions.

Some professional schools offer you a choice of an on-site interview at their school, or a regional interview closer to your own home. This latter interview is usually conducted by a private practitioner who is a graduate of the school, and takes place in his/her office. An advantage of the regional interview is its lower cost. However, the on-site interview gives you an opportunity to see the school and interact with students, and the admission committee usually gives it more weight.

If you are already traveling to a particular city or region for interviews, and have not yet heard from another school to which you have applied located in that same area, it is quite proper to call or write that school. If they plan to grant you an interview, they may be willing to arrange it at that same time. This may not always be possible, however. Once the interview dates are arranged, you will need to think about transportation. If air travel is necessary, special rates are available through a discount ticket program sponsored by NAAHP. See your advisor for details. If possible, arrive at the destination the day before the interview. This will allow you time to explore the institution and perhaps talk with enrolled students. Explore the possibility of staying with students; they can provide valuable information and tips.

At the interview, most schools use a “one-to-one” format, with one or more interviewers. A few schools use a committee interview, with three or four persons on the panel. These interviewers are typically clinical faculty, basic science faculty and students, especially where multiple interviews are the pattern. These personal interviews are relatively unstructured, and usually last from thirty minutes to an hour. A short interview does not necessarily mean it was unsuccessful, nor does a long one mean success; the actual length of the interview is not significant. After the interview it is a good idea to follow-up with a “thank you” letter acknowledging the efforts of the interviewers.

## **Interview Tips**

1. Important preparation for your interview is to think about yourself – your goals, strengths, weaknesses, and the information you most wish to communicate to the admission committee. This preparation is of enormous help if your interviewer begins the session by saying, “Tell me about yourself.” Think about the current state of the profession and how you stand on various issues such as euthanasia, health care reform, malpractice suits, animal rights and cost containment for health services. There are no “right” answers for these questions; the interviewer wants to determine whether you have thought seriously about the profession you wish to enter, and can defend your positions in an articulate manner. It is also good preparation to know about the school where you are interviewing, information which can be learned from the school’s publications and by talking to students on that campus before your interview session. A common interview question is, “Why are you interested in attending our school?” Some career counseling centers at undergraduate institutions provide “mock interviews” and videotape the student for a later debriefing of strengths and weaknesses during the interview.

2. If possible, arrange to arrive at the school early enough to look around and “get a feeling” for the campus. A last-minute arrival can produce unwanted stress and tension. If the opportunity presents itself, try to talk to students about their feelings for and about the school. You may want to check in the library or cafeteria to find someone with whom to talk. This may give you additional insight which is impossible to glean from brochures or conversations with administrators. Some schools help you make arrangements to stay overnight with a student. Your prehealth advising office may give you names, phone numbers and addresses of alumni from your college.

3. The professional school may inform you of the names and positions or titles of the interviewer(s) and where you are to report for the first interview. The interview can be open or closed-file. For the latter, the interviewer has not been given any information about your personal or academic background.

4. Refrain from anything which might be viewed as objectionable by the interviewer, such as gum chewing, smoking, and nervous mannerisms. Always maintain good eye contact. This is the time to display your best “professional manner.” While it is impossible to eliminate all the stress inherent in the interview process, following some of the suggestions made here may help to minimize it. The most important thing to remember is to conduct yourself naturally and calmly.

5. Try not to appear defensive. If you make an error in one of your statements and realize it, admit it. Never try to bluff a response; avoid appearing close-minded. Rely on your

ability to persuade. On the other hand, do not try to take control of the interview. Try to be open-minded and willing to learn. Understand the difference between questions requiring factual responses and those asking for opinions.

6. Do not be afraid to express your feelings during the interview; be open about your concerns. Many interviewers ask that you continue if you are too brief; be prepared to give more detailed explanations. They often ask about your family and the kind of relationship you have with family members. This type of open-ended format gives you an opportunity to describe accomplishments while giving background information. An applicant should not sound boastful but “if you’ve done it, it ain’t bragging” is an old aphorism. The interview gives you the opportunity to make the committee aware of positive factors about you that would be difficult to present in any other way. Remember, the interview is an opportunity to gain first-hand information about the institution you want to attend.

Interviewers will evaluate you according to:

**Maturity and Sense of Responsibility:** Questions posed in this area will seek to ascertain your level of self-confidence and your self-understanding. These are some of the elements that are assessed by admission interviewers because they are invaluable to practicing health professionals. After all, it is your self-confidence and self-understanding that will assist you in handling stressful situations. Further, it is the same two elements which provide you with the ability to take on a task and see it through.

**Interpersonal Skills:** As a member of a helping profession, you will probably come upon a wide range of people. Since you will be trying to assist them with the maintenance of their health, and to some extent their personal problems, the interviewer will be interested in assessing your ability to relate to and communicate with people from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Interviewers try to find indicators of your ability to empathize. They are envisioning you as a health care provider.

**Motivation:** No doubt you feel that you have displayed an uncommon amount of motivation through courses you have undertaken, grades you have earned, and sacrifices you have made. Motivation, however, from the perspective of the interviewer, includes other aspects. Questions you might expect in this area may relate to your understanding of your own needs, capabilities, and sources of satisfaction. In addition, the interviewer is interested in finding out whether you have a realistic understanding of the health profession you have chosen. The interviewer might want to further “test” your motivation by posing questions regarding your experiences in the field you have chosen. The interviewer may also wish to ascertain how familiar you are with the important issues currently facing the health profession and how much thought you have given to being a professional in a changing society. For example, what are your thoughts on health care reform? Are you acquainted with the various proposals?

In addition to familiarizing yourself with various topics that may be covered when interviewing, the following tips may prove useful in making the interview a less stressful experience.

1. Dress to appear as a professional. Your appearance may help or hinder the impression the school has on you.

2. Make it a point to review your transcript, as well as your copy of the application materials that were sent to the school. You may be asked to address courses and grades or to expand upon a topic brought up in your essay(s). This may also be a good time for you to make a mental list of things you would like the school to know about you that were **not** included in your application (e.g., achievements, extracurricular activities, etc.)

3. Remain calm and in control of your emotions. Although some nervousness is understandable, applicants are expected to be able to control these feelings.

4. Refrain from expressing opinions concerning subjects about which you know nothing.

5. Good manners are important.

6. Be prepared and alert when answering questions. The interviewer may be interested in your ability to handle ambiguity and adversity.

7. Demonstrate through your responses your willingness to communicate and to follow advice.

Factors important to the interviewer are how well informed you are, the kind of career preparation you have made, your knowledge about the social, legal, and political aspects of health care, and your own self-awareness. Be authentic and maintain a positive attitude in presenting yourself. Some schools give you a comment sheet after the interview which asks for feedback. It is important and appropriate to express your concerns as soon as possible after the interview should the interview go badly. Such comments are normally considered confidential by the administrator in charge of the interview process. Your prehealth professions advisor can usually help you decide how to handle this situation.

*Medical Professions Admission Guide, Strategy For Success*