Preparing for Interviews

By Kristen Bischel LU ‘17

**I. STRATEGY**

**A. Before Your First Interview**

1. Do some reading

* I read three interview prep books (kind of) prior to interviewing… “The Medical School Interview” (Desai and Katta)—INCREDIBLY helpful, “The Health Care Handbook: Second Edition (Askin and Moore)—also very good, and “Bioethics: Principles, Issues, and Cases” (Vaughn)—skimmed
* Desai and Katta: I felt ready to tackle any interview that came my way after reading this—a MUST read
* Askin and Moore: I thought I had little understanding of the healthcare system prior to reading this book, and I knew I would be very uncomfortable if I was asked any healthcare questions in an interview situation…this book focuses on the status of our healthcare system through the passage of the Affordable Care Act, so it isn’t totally up to date, but it is thorough though easy to understand. I also made sure to pay attention to any recent healthcare news (Graham-Cassidy bill was hot when I was interviewing) to keep myself up to date on more recent shifts in healthcare legislation. Only at 1/6 interviews I attended was I asked a healthcare question (how would you fix the healthcare system—eek) but I felt like I was able to show some understanding of some of the major issues at stake with the new knowledge base I had
* Vaughn: This was a last-ditch effort to get some biomedical ethics in, as I did not take any courses at Lawrence (didn’t have room in my schedule). I basically just read the section summaries to get a good understanding of the arguments for and against various ethical topics. I was not asked any ethically-focused questions during formal interviews though I did have to write an essay reflecting on an ethical situation.
* Also make sure that you are reading a good book (that you’d be comfortable and proud talking to an MD about during your interview)…at 2-3 interviews I was asked about the last book I read

2. Reflect on your experiences

* There is a really nice description of how to do this in “The Medical School Interview” but basically I would just list out all of the experiences that you wrote about on your AMCAS application and reflect on how they were meaningful/inspired your interest in medicine/cultivated skills/changed you as a person

3. Create an interview “cheat sheet” handout to generically use for most interviews

* I strongly relied on “The Medical School Interview” to structure my review packet. For each question that I included, I brainstormed anywhere from 3-7 points that I aimed to cover for that question—though I didn’t expect to remember all of them come interview time. The goal was to thoroughly think through traditional interview questions and my experiences ahead of time so that I could eloquently and confidently discuss them during the actual interview. It’s incredibly important to have detailed, evidence-backed answers highlighting your qualities and experiences in answering every question!
* I chose to include the following topics in my handout:
* Tell me about yourself (focusing on experiences, me NOW)
* Tell me about your university
* \*\*\*Why medicine: basically describe the progression of your interest in this career path…this naturally should center on your personal statement. Make sure to focus on your clinical experiences and what you gained from them but also make you are honest and genuine in your explanation. This question will take some serious soul-searching. I was asked something along the lines of this question at every interview. Somewhere in that “why medicine” answer you must convey your dedication to serving mankind/humanity…admission committees want to know that you are pursuing a career in medicine for the right reasons!
* What are your specific goals in medicine?
* Which area of medicine would you like to pursue?
* Why do you think you’d make a good physician?
* Most/least favorite patient interaction?
* \*\*\*Why [insert school]: Make sure that your answer to this question is unique for every school—schools can tell if you haven’t done your research and/or your interest isn’t genuine. You should have 3 good reasons of why you want to attend that school. Another variation that I was asked was “what are you looking for in a medical school”—a more general response is required, though inserting specific programs from that school is reasonable…more on this in “before other interviews” section
* Why should we choose you/what can you uniquely offer to our school and the medical profession as a whole (traditional diversity question)?
* \*\*\*Why service/[insert unique experience]: another one of the “big 3” questions (why medicine, why [insert school]) I heavily prepared for…for me, this is what made me stand out as an applicant, and it’s especially critical that you have a solid answer to this question if you’re applying to any Jesuit schools.
* \*\*Be ready to talk about clinical experiences/service opportunities/anything on your application, especially things that make you stand out
* \*\*How have you demonstrated emotional maturity/coped with stress? I was asked this question at every interview, though it may have to do with the personal experiences I discussed on my AMCAS application
* What are your strengths/weaknesses
* \*Tell me about a time when you experienced conflict: I was asked this 2-3 times, which surprised me
* Describe a time when things did not go as planned
* \*Describe a situation in which you worked as a team and you had to take the initiative/take on a leadership role
* Tell me a time when you were disappointed with your performance
* Tell me a time when your honesty/integrity was compromised
* \*What are some of the challenges facing healthcare today
* \*What are you passionate about/what things give you the greatest satisfaction in life: strangely enough, for a couple of the interviews I went to, I was asked to reveal things about myself that were not expressed on my application
* \*What was the last book you read

**B. Before other interviews**

1. Research new school🡪THOUGHTFUL questions!

* I tried to do this 3-4 days in advance…I thought of three good reasons of why I wanted to attend the school then backed them up with my personal experiences as well as the specific programs that I was interested in that were provided by the school, and how these programs would adequately prepare me/cultivate skills that are essential to a career in medicine…make sure you use terms and programs that were listed on the school website—being able to recall these names in an interview situation looks impressive. Also come up with 4-5 good questions (I usually tried to center these on my three reasons, to make remembering them easier) ahead of time. Another thing to note is your three good reasons for attending one school could easily be the same three reasons for attending another school (i.e., clinically-focused education, commitment to service, value in collaboration/team-based approach to medicine, patient-motivated research…) because that’s what you’re looking for in a medical school! Just make sure to point toward specific programs/things that school is doing that demonstrates their commitment to your interests

2. Pack well in advance (create a checklist!)

* My checklist included*(items inside garment bag, backpack, small purse to pack in backpack):* money/wallet/keys, travel information/tickets, every day clothes, 2 interview day outfits (+ shoes), rain jacket, water bottle/coffee thermos, pjs, meds, toiletries (travel size liquids), towel/shower shoes/pillow (if staying with student host), SNACKS (for travel and interview day), fun book/adult coloring book/earbuds for travel and downtime, laptop, chargers, notebook with printed handouts and pen, small hair brush, emergency meds (benadryl, ibuprofen, anti-acid, cold meds), gum, bandaids

3. Print out primary application, secondary application for school, revised interview “cheat sheet” handout, all emails/correspondence with school, map, travel documents

4. Review printed materials and practice interview questions

* In the beginning, I prepared far more—I didn’t prepare much at all by my 6th interview, though all of the interviews I attended were within a month span, with four being within a tight two-week window. You get better at it with practice. For interviews 1 and 2, I tried to read through everything (primary, cheat sheet handout) two days before. The day before the interview (while traveling) I read through the cheat sheet handout, practiced answering those questions in my head, read through the handout again, then focusing on those big 3 questions (why medicine, why school, why service/experience). By the later interviews it was “make sure you got the why [insert school] question down” (and the 4 questions)!

**II. USEFUL TIPS**

A. Prepare enough but don’t over prepare—my best interviews were the result of reading over my prep handouts but not trying too hard to answer my questions exactly how I prepared them the first time. It’s important to be able to express yourself naturally.

B. REMEMBER: be yourself, be HONEST/sincere, stay true to your application (they chose you based on who you were on paper!), tailor responses to that specific school [to some extent], and stay relaxed

C. Enjoy the interview day and let your enthusiasm show! The interview day is a product of all of the hard work you have put in…be confident and know that you DESERVE to be there!

D. Take notes on the school the day after your interview…the interview days and schools will meld together

E. Send thank you notes/emails within a day of the interview

**III. THINGS I WISH I WOULD HAVE DONE**

A. Prepared initial “interview handout” earlier in advance: I completed mine two days before my first interview, which was too stressful

B. Double check travel bags before leaving—I forgot a second outfit a couple of times and wished I had one due to changes in weather

C. Keep normal sleep/eating habits as much as possible—due to travel, I got less sleep than I would’ve liked a couple of times, but also be weary of getting too much sleep—that can also feel strange