

Worksheet 3.1

Thinking About Medical Specialties

First things first: You do not need to know your medical specialty now — or even need to be thinking about it. However, many applicants envision themselves in a specialty before beginning medical school based on prior experiences and medical interests.

The second thing to keep in mind: Changing your mind about what type of physician you want to be is not a sign that you are less committed to the profession. We know from responses to the AAMC [Matriculating Student Questionnaire](#) (MSQ) and [Graduation Questionnaire](#) (GQ) that most medical students are either undecided or change their minds about their specialty preference during medical school. In fact, of those who begin medical school with a specialty in mind (as captured by the MSQ), only about one-quarter of medical students stick with this choice throughout medical school (per their responses in the GQ). This means, conversely, about three-quarters of medical students either have no idea what specialty they'll pursue upon matriculation or end up changing their mind during medical school.

It is natural and expected that your choices will evolve as you gain new educational and clinical experiences. Keep your options open to allow for new experiences to inspire you.

That said, if you are an applicant with some exposure to specialties before medical school, you may find it helpful to keep a journal or notes about your experiences while they are fresh in your mind, which you can use once you enter medical school and begin the [CiM program](#). You will likely find it helpful to refer to these notes once you have matriculated as you progress through medical school.

Here are some prompts to help you consider your specialty experiences:

- Do you have a specialty or specialties in mind? _____
- What is your experience with that specialty? _____
- Have you shadowed in that specialty with different physicians or in different settings? _____

- Have you shadowed in more than one specialty? If so, list them here: _____

- Take a moment to compare your experiences. Write down how they were similar and different and how you felt about each: _____

You can also visit your school's career center for more guidance about exploring medical careers. A career center may help you find shadowing and other opportunities that can expose you to career options. You could also speak with people who have already completed any experiences you're considering.

A note about shadowing: In recent years, due to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA, it may be more difficult to obtain permission to shadow a physician. Some programs facilitate paid experiences domestically and abroad, though they can be quite expensive. Check with your prehealth advising office to see if they have experience with a particular program to make sure it's legitimate and safe.

For more information about shadowing, lab, and volunteer experiences, refer to:

- [Shadowing a Doctor](#)
- [How to Get Research Experience](#)
- [Finding Health Care-Related Volunteer Opportunities](#)