

Informed Career Choice Decision Making Booklet for Prospective Medical Students



2021

Introduction

The congruence between the capabilities and passion of the students, and the requirements of the study program have a crucial impact on study success. Before deciding to join medical schools, students should know expected academic abilities and personal characteristics, and evaluate one's natural abilities, personalities, values, circumstances, and suitability for a caring profession. In this booklet, you will find some basic information such as program description and requirement, positive attributes to become a successful medical student/doctor, roles of medical doctor, and career path, opportunities, and challenges which will help guide you through your career choice.

Objective of the booklet

The objective of this booklet is to provide basic information about medical training and career for aspiring young students who are inclined to join the field of medicine to become Medical Doctor.

Brief history of medicine

Medicine is the practice concerned with the maintenance of health and the prevention, alleviation, or cure of disease. (Encyclopedia Britannica)¹. Medicine was for long under the eclipse of superstition and speculation before it began to emerge as a true science. The history started when Hippocrates, known as the father of medicine, wrote the oath in ancient Greece in the 5th century BC, and is a direct inspiration for oaths of office that physicians swear upon entry into the profession today.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/science/medicine>

The year of 1896 is considered as the beginning of modern medicine in Ethiopia. The first medical school in the country opened in 1964. Hakim Workneh Eshete (1864 – 1952) was the first Ethiopian medical doctor to practice in Addis Ababa. He had his medical training in India and Scotland and graduated in 1891. As well as Dr. Widad Kidane Mariam was born to an Ethiopian émigré family in Palestine during the Italian occupation of her country of origin. She studied medicine at the American University of Beirut and became the “first female” medical practitioner and top most physician administrator in charge of the medical services division in the Ministry of Health in 1960s to 1970s. Currently, we have around 39 medical schools including the privately owned schools.

Program Description

The Medical program will help graduates to be able to:

- Apply medical knowledge, clinical skills and professional attitudes to provide high-quality and safe patient-centered care.
- Apply appropriate interpersonal and communication skills that result in effective information exchange and team work with patients, patients’ families, professional associates and the community at large.
- Work effectively with other health care professionals and support staff to provide safe, high-quality and compassionate patient centered care.
- Develop a vision of a high-quality health care system and, in collaboration with other health care leaders, take responsibility for effecting change to move the system toward the achievement of that vision.
- Contribute their expertise and influence as they work and be role models for communities or patient populations to improve health.

- Demonstrate a lifelong commitment to excellence in practice through continuous learning, the teaching of others, the evaluation of evidence, and contributions to scholarship.
- Commit to the health and well-being of individual patients and society through ethical practice, high personal standards of behavior, accountability to the profession and society, physician led regulation, and maintenance of personal health.

Duration of the Program

The undergraduate Medicine training program takes *six to seven years* and has the following phases:

- Pre-medicine (common courses): six months to one year
- Preclinical programs (Biomedical Sciences): Two years
- Clinical Rotations (Patient based learning): Two years
- Internship (working as a doctor under supervision): One year

Program Requirements

Admission to a medical school is highly competitive. It constitutes the following criteria and the cut-off points decided by authorized body at the beginning of each academic year. To join a medical school, students should:

- Have a positive attitude towards the profession
- Have a background in the natural sciences
- Have very good academic performance in both university entrance exam and first year courses
- Meet the criteria set by MoSHE for entry to a medical program
- Physically and mentally fit to effectively practice the profession

Students must at all times be physically and mentally capable of completing the training and subsequently practicing as a medical doctor.

Applicants with significant physical disabilities such as complete loss of vision, complete loss of hearing, and serious musculoskeletal disabilities and severe psychiatric or mental problems are incompatible with the routine practice of medicine.

Positive attributes to become a successful medical student/doctor

It is well recognized that the cognitive aspect of students which includes memory retention and analytical skills is crucial to becoming a successful medical student or doctor. Since medical professionals spend a great deal of time working with patients and their families, certain personality traits are important to enable you to endure medical training and the daily challenges of the profession. Personality traits such as being empathetic, caring, compassionate, and respectful for patients, families and communities. Students are expected to demonstrate diligence, patience, emotional stability, integrity, humility, motivation, and altruism. They should also be assertive, self-conscious, energetic and flexible with capability to handle stress and communicate effectively for succeeding in medical school and career.

The ability to endure both physical (long studying or working hours) and psychological stressors (withstanding exposure to stresses such as blood and vomitus and dealing with diseased individuals and deceased body) are some of the positive attributes that an individual student should own. Further knowledge can be gained by talking to current

medical students, doctors, and by reading books on the topic of studying medicine and using personality inventory tools like **Five Factor Model of Personality and Myers Briggs Models**.

Challenges of being medical doctor

As a Medical Student

- It takes a long time to become a medical doctor (6 - 7 years)
- Dealing with time constraints to cover a broad range of medical courses may lead to experiencing stress
- Developing professional identities (night shifts, unsocial hours, long teaching hours)
- On-going study with only fixed and short yearly vacation



Fig: Medical students learning in skill lab

As a physician

- You are going to be working long and unpredictable hours throughout your professional career. Many doctors find themselves working long hours each day and not having enough time to spend with their family and friends.
- There can be duty of serving on-call responsibilities, treating people after-hours because of emergencies, responding to epidemics and disasters, and working over weekends and holidays.

- There are high levels of job-related stress in this career. Even though it is highly rewarding to be able to save lives, this role can also become highly stressful.
- There is liability for medical malpractice before the law in case of suspected medical errors or negligence.
- There is also a possibility of being deployed in an area where accesses to basic facilities like housing, roads, electricity, etc... are limited.
- Occupational hazard may include exposure to highly contagious diseases, unsafe working environments (natural and man-made conditions like flooding, drought, conflict)

Rewards of being medical doctor

Working in medicine can be immensely satisfying. One of the most frequently stated rewarding aspects of being a physician is making a deep impactful difference in someone else's life. You have the ability to significantly improve the quality of life of your patients and their loved ones, and this can be a tremendously satisfying experience. The personal connection it creates with patients and their families is unmatched by any other profession. It's truly an honor to be trusted with another human being's health and wellbeing, requiring a deep level of trust. Remember that as a physician, you are there for patients in their most trying times. This deep personal and emotional connection with another person is often challenging, but is also tremendously rewarding.

Opportunities of medical career

There are opportunities for joining medical study program. To list some of them; it is a job that comes with high levels of personal satisfaction, is a profession which grants a good job opportunity in any part of the

world (in governmental, non-governmental and private institutions), gives chance to continuously learn on the job as medicine and technology update and evolve. It also offers diverse career specialization opportunities, create chance to enjoy teamwork and cooperation. What is more, it makes the graduate a potential leader at different levels: manager, department head, hospital medical director, medical school dean, health science college dean, university president, head of offices (zonal, regional, and national); and provides opportunities to work as a business owner (consultancy, running a health facility or health science college). Finally, joining medical science also offers a path to move into academic medicine or do research within a specific specialty.

Career Path

- ✓ After graduating from Medical School, one will earn a degree of “Doctor of Medicine” and may be addressed as either of the terms below:
 - General Practitioner (GP)
 - Medical Doctor
 - Physician
- ✓ After completing another 3 - 5 years of training (depending on specialty track selected) Medical doctor may be referred to as “Specialist Doctor.”
- ✓ Specialist doctors may further study on a specific part of one’s field for 2-3 years to become a “Sub-Specialist”
- ✓ A medical doctor can also enroll in a Master’s program in different fields (Basic sciences, Clinical sciences, public health, etc...)



Figure 1. Vertical and horizontal career pathways for medical students

Summary

Self-assessment for decision making

In conclusion, before deciding to join medical schools you have to carefully assess your ability, circumstances and your suitability for a caring profession. Remember that, academic achievement alone is not sufficient to the practice of health professionals; it also requires attributes that go beyond science itself and extend to humanism and compassion. Be caring, empathetic, focus on exercising courtesy and compassion with your patients. After graduation you are expected to dedicate yourself to improve the lives of other regardless of where you are working and how tired you are or what is going on in your personal life. If you are dedicated to improving the lives of others and spend long

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working hours with patients, then you've applied to the right profession. Before deciding to choose medicine as a career assess yourself with the following questions

	Parameters	Yes	No
1	Do I have passion towards the medical profession?		
2	Do I understand clearly what is required and expected from medical doctor?		
3	Do I have interest to help patients and families?		
4	Do I understand the challenges of medical profession?		
5	Do I ready to face the challenge of medical education and career?		
6	Am I attracted by the opportunities of becoming medical doctor?		
7	Do I feel comfortable to take responsibility about patient?		
8	Do I have an interest to listen respectfully to the opinions of patients and family members?		

Further reading

- Amha M (2020). Teaching Article: Brief history of medical education in Ethiopia. *Ethiop Med J*, 2020, Vol. 58, No. 1.
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