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Carleen Eaton, MD

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FOR
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by Carleen Eaton, MD

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About the Author

Carleen Eaton, MD, is a graduate of the UCLA School of Medicine and the founder of prehealthadvising.com, an admissions consulting firm specializing in helping applicants to health professions programs. She has used her expertise in admissions and test preparation as well as her experiences as an applicant who received acceptances to top-ranked medical schools to guide hundreds of applicants successfully through the medical school admissions process. She was a guest on a National Public Radio segment discussing medical school interviews and has spoken to groups at colleges and universities about medical school admissions topics such as the personal statement and the medical school application timeline.

Dr. Eaton was an award-winning instructor and medical school admissions consultant at a national test preparation company. During her tenure, she focused on students preparing for the MCAT and other health professions admissions examinations and advised medical school applicants. She has also developed and taught a biology lecture series that is featured at the online educational site Educator.com. Prior to medical school, Dr. Eaton received her bachelor of science in microbiology and molecular genetics from UCLA and did research in the field of infectious diseases at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center. She currently lives in Southern California with her husband, two daughters, a toy poodle, and a cat.

Dedication

For Matt.

Author's Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Getting into *Medical School For Dummies* is a guide for anyone who's considering a medical career, whether you're having your first thoughts about entering medicine or are in the midst of putting together your application package for medical school. In this book, aspiring physicians can find help on everything from making the decision to become a doctor to managing the premedical years and the application process to getting off to a great start in medical school.

The road leading from premedical student to medical student is a long one, but knowing what to expect each step of the way helps you succeed and makes the journey less stressful. Use this book as your road map to lead you through the bumpy parts of the path to achieving your goal of getting into medical school.

Read on to discover what getting accepted to medical school takes and how to approach each step of the application process. You'll also find information about many other topics to help you someday join the rewarding, challenging, and noble profession of medicine.

About This Book

I wrote this book as someone who is an MD and a medical school admissions advisor. I drew both on my experiences as a former applicant to medical school and on a decade of experience (so far) advising students who are striving for admission to medical school. I know what juggling a heavy load of premedical courses, filling out endless application essays, and going through nerve-racking med school admissions interviews is like, and I keep these experiences in mind with every tip, thought, and bit of guidance I give you.

Getting into Medical School For Dummies also stands out as a resource for future physicians because

- ✔ **It's thorough.** I cover not only nuts-and-bolts topics related to applying to medical school (such as writing a compelling personal statement, obtaining strong letters of recommendation, and nailing the admission interview) but also many other related subjects (such as dual-degree programs, osteopathic [DO] medical schools, paying for your medical education, and preparing for medical school).

- ✔ **It's clear.** In classic *For Dummies* style, this book is logically structured, organized, and easy to follow. This book helps you understand what you need to do as well as when and how to do it in order to get admitted to med school. (Keep in mind that you don't have to read this book from cover to cover; you can read only what you want and put the book away until you need it again.)
- ✔ **It's practical.** I focus on giving you hands-on, how-to guidance to help you achieve your goal of admission to medical school. I go far beyond simply describing the application process; I also lead you through each step.
- ✔ **It's written for applicants from many different backgrounds.** This book is for applicants in any situation, not just traditional applicants. Some applicants plan to go straight from college to medical school; others take time off between the two phases of their education. Many applicants are trying for a seat in medical school for the first time; others are reapplying after unsuccessful initial attempts.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you get the most out of this book, I use a few standard conventions:

- ✔ Some of the terms related to the medical school admissions process may be unfamiliar to you. I put new terms in *italics* the first time that I use them so that they stand out, and then I explain the meaning of each term in the context of medical school admissions.
- ✔ I use **bold** text to highlight keywords in bulleted lists and the action parts of numbered steps.
- ✔ In some sections I provide you with web addresses so that you can look up resources related to topics discussed in the book; these addresses appear in `monofont`. Certain addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text when this book was printed. If that happened, I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. Simply type in the web address exactly as you see it in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

What You're Not to Read

As you read this book, you may notice that some of the text is placed in a box with a shaded background. These boxes are called *sidebars* and may include examples or other information that you may find interesting but that isn't essential to the topic at hand. Other bits of text are marked with the Technical Stuff icon. If you skip any of these items, you won't miss out on anything critical and will still be able to easily follow the rest of the text.

Foolish Assumptions

If you're reading this book, I assume that you have an interest in a medical career. Because med students have so many different journeys to the profession, that's about all I can assume with certainty. That said, I'm guessing at least one of the following applies to you:

- ✔ You're still at the very early stages of your exploration of the medical profession.
- ✔ You're already committed to becoming a physician.
- ✔ You're gearing up to apply for medical school soon or are even in the midst of the application process already.

One thing I don't assume is that you're familiar with specific types of programs such as dual-degree programs or osteopathic medical schools, so the chapters focusing on special types of programs begin with a general description to give you the foundation you need before I delve deeper into the topic.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into six parts, which are divided into chapters covering a specific topic or related topics. This structure makes it easy for you to quickly find the information you need. Here's the breakdown.

Part I: Planning the Premedical Years

This part describes the phases of education and training required to become a physician as well as the pros and cons of the profession. You also get the straight story about what you need to do to be competitive for admission to medical school. In addition, Part I covers other topics relevant to students who are preparing to begin or who have already started their premedical studies. Some examples include picking a major, choosing premedical courses, and making the most of time outside of class through extracurricular activities. This part helps you build your resume as a premedical student so that you're a strong candidate for admission to med school.

Part II: Applying to Medical School

This part is the longest one in the book. It contains seven chapters dedicated to various aspects of the medical school application process:

- ✔ Chapter 5 provides an overview of the application process, including a timeline to keep you on track throughout the admissions cycle.
- ✔ Chapter 6 takes on a topic that weighs heavy on the minds of premedical students: the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). It fills you in on what to expect on the test and how to prepare so that you can achieve a stellar score.
- ✔ Putting together a strategic list of medical schools is a challenging task, but with the help of the tips in Chapter 7, you'll be set to target schools that are a good fit for you.
- ✔ Chapters 8, 9, and 10 go into depth about different steps of the application process. Among the topics addressed are crafting your personal statement and other parts of the primary application, asking for letters of recommendation, completing secondary applications, and acing medical school interviews.
- ✔ Chapter 11 gives you pointers on how to handle any of the three types of responses you may receive from a medical school you've applied to: acceptance, rejection, or placement on the waitlist.

Part III: Osteopathic Medical Schools, Dual-Degree Programs, and More

Many physicians practicing medicine are graduates of osteopathic medical schools. These doctors hold a DO (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine) rather than an MD. Chapter 12 introduces osteopathic medicine and medical schools as well as discusses the application process for DO schools.

In this part, you also become familiar with dual-degree programs offered by MD and DO schools, including joint baccalaureate-MD/DO programs and programs that combine a medical degree with a master's or PhD.

This part concludes with a chapter describing the option of obtaining a medical degree internationally as well as the issues that path can create, such as obtaining a residency training position and medical licensure in the U.S. as a graduate of an international medical school.

Part IV: Nontraditional Applicants, Reapplicants, and Disadvantaged Applicants

This part focuses on applicants with special circumstances, such as those who are considered nontraditional applicants and applicants who have applied to medical school at least once previously. This part also addresses issues concerning minority applicants and applicants who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or have a disability.

- ✓ Chapter 15 takes on topics relevant to career-changers and other non-traditional applicants.
- ✓ Chapter 16 tackles subjects relevant to reapplicants, such as when to reapply, how to strengthen their application portfolios, and factors to consider when putting together their lists of medical schools.
- ✓ Chapter 17 focuses on minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged applicants as well as applicants with disabilities. Among the topics I address are enrichment programs available for minority and disadvantaged students and the issue of disclosing a disability when applying to medical school.

Part V: You're In! Getting Ready to Go

Part V takes you beyond the admission process by providing you with information about two topics of major importance for soon-to-be medical students. Chapter 18 discusses the cost of attending medical school, helps you plan a budget, and describes the various types of financial aid available to medical students. Chapter 19 provides tips about how to prepare for medical school and how to succeed after you're there.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

The Part of Tens is a tradition in *For Dummies* books; it features information in ten (or so) quick pieces. Chapter 20 describes ten things that you should know about med school, such as where you stand in the hierarchy of medicine and how staying on the good side of the nurses is critical during clinical rotations. In Chapter 21, you find out how to decipher some of the baffling slang that med students and doctors use.

Icons Used in This Book

The symbols you see on some pages of this book are there to make sure you don't miss out on especially important information. I use the following icons:



This icon marks critical information. These are the items that you don't want to overlook if you're determined to secure yourself a seat in medical school.



The information marked with this icon is interesting but not essential to know as you prepare to apply to medical school.



You find this icon in the margin next to text containing a tip to keep in mind as you're building your application portfolio as a premedical student, going through the admissions process, or getting ready to head off to medical school.



Watch out when you see this icon. It warns you about aspects of the application process or other topics presented in this book that may trip you up if you're not careful.

Where to Go from Here

Depending on your situation, you may find it most helpful to head straight for a specific chapter or to start from page one and read the entire book from front to back. (I won't complain if you do!) Either way works because this book is nonlinear, so you don't have to worry about getting lost if you read the chapters out of order.

If you're just starting to consider a medical career and don't know much about the profession or how to become a physician, start with Part I. This part is also the ideal starting point if you haven't yet begun your premedical studies or are currently a premedical student and are looking for help with topics related to the premedical years.

If the application process is looming directly ahead of you and you're pressed for time, consider going right to Part II, where you find a thorough discussion of the admission process and plenty of tips on how to put together a strong application package for medical school. In Chapter 5, I give an overview of the medical school application process so that even if you don't know the first thing about when, where, or how to apply, you'll understand the structure of the application process and timeline by the time you finish the chapter. If

you've already started working on your application and are stuck on a particular step, flip to the relevant chapter to find immediate help.

Applicants to osteopathic medical schools, dual-degree programs, or international schools may prefer to start with Part III to get information about the particular type of program they're aiming for before going back and reading other chapters relevant to their situations.

No matter where you are on your journey to medical school, I wish you the best of luck!

Part I

Planning the Premedical Years

getting started
on
the road
to med
school



Visit www.dummies.com for great (and free!) Dummies content online.

In this part . . .

- Explore the pros and cons of a career in medicine, check out different practice settings, assess your chances of med school acceptance, and decide whether medicine is right for you.
- Survey the steps to become a practicing physician: college, medical school, residency, and (for some specialties) fellowship.
- Go through the premedical years by choosing an undergraduate school, selecting a major, and planning your course work.
- Discover the importance of taking part in extracurricular activities, such as clinical and research experiences, community service, and clubs and organizations.