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Medical Education / anatomy books

Preparation for a career as a physician is long and demanding. It usually takes 11 years of study after high school to become a physician. The training typically includes four years of undergraduate or premedical study at a college or university; four years of medical school; and three years of advanced training in a residency. The exact length of study varies. Some colleges have a combined undergraduate and medical school program that lasts six years.

Premedical students usually major in science, or take some courses in biology, chemistry, biochemistry, mathematics, and physics. Medicine demands well-rounded individuals with knowledge of the humanities and social sciences, and courses in English, history, literature, art, music, sociology, and other fields are important. Many premedical students gain practical experience by taking summer jobs or volunteer positions in hospitals, clinics, or research laboratories.

Acceptance into a medical school requires excellent college grades, high scores on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), good letters of recommendation, and a personal interview with school officials. The United States has 144 medical schools. Of those, 125 award a Doctor of Medicine degree and 19 award a Doctor of Osteopathy. Students face very tough competition for admission to medical school. In 2000, more than 37,000 people applied for admission to medical school, but only 16,303 were accepted.

Education of a physician does not end with medical school graduation. New physicians must pass an examination for a state license to practice. Many then go into postgraduate education. MDs take a residency that lasts from one to seven years. DOs take an internship, which may be followed by a residency. During postgraduate education, physicians pursue advanced training and practical experience treating patients under the supervision of more experienced doctors. This postgraduate training usually takes place in a hospital or clinic.

To be recognized as a specialist in a particular field, a physician must pass a special examination and become board-certified. Physicians earn a certificate from the American Board of Medical Specialties, an organization in Atlanta, Georgia, that oversees the certification process.

Physicians who plan to go into research may obtain a doctoral degree in genetics, immunology, biochemistry, or another field. Some obtain still more training as postdoctoral fellows on the research teams of established scientists. Physicians who plan to specialize in public health may study for a master's degree in that field.

After completing postgraduate education, physicians begin a lifetime of learning to keep current with new advances. They regularly read medical journals, take continuing education courses, and attend medical conferences.