

The Educational Path to Family Medicine



Undergraduate Education

All physicians begin their postsecondary education by earning a bachelor's degree from an undergraduate college or university. Medical schools are professional schools that recruit college graduates. Medical school applicants can have a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Arts in any field. However, some specific prerequisite courses are mandatory for application to medical school, so many undergraduate students will follow a premedical track during college. Some people choose to get additional training by completing postbaccalaureate courses or earning a master's degree before applying to medical school.

Freshman Year	Sophomore Year	Junior Year	Senior Year	Graduation
<p>Explore medical career options: meet with advisor, visit aspiring docs, explore financial aid, etc.</p> <p>Get some experience: participate in enrichment programs, volunteer or intern.</p>	<p>Stay on track for medical school: work with pre-health advisor, attend pre-health meetings, volunteer/work in the field.</p> <p>Get more experience and review resources: fee assistance, AMCAS application and MCAT processes, research/internship experience.</p>	<p>Strategize with your advisor on a game plan: gap year, post-bac program, letters of recommendation, pre-med and required coursework.</p> <p>Register for the MCAT exam: register early, compare schools, begin filling out AMCAS application.</p> <p>SUMMER: finalize and submit AMCAS application, continue with volunteer/work.</p>	<p>Prepare for medical school interviews: consult with advisor, ask aspiring docs for interview tips.</p> <p>Receive letters of acceptance or rejection: if accepted, decide which school and complete FAFSA; if waitlisted or rejected, speak with advisor, consider gap year.</p>	<p>Get ready for medical school: buy books, find housing, attend orientation.</p>

AMCAS = American Medical College Application Service

FAFSA = Free Application for Federal Student Aid

MCAT = Medical College Admission Test

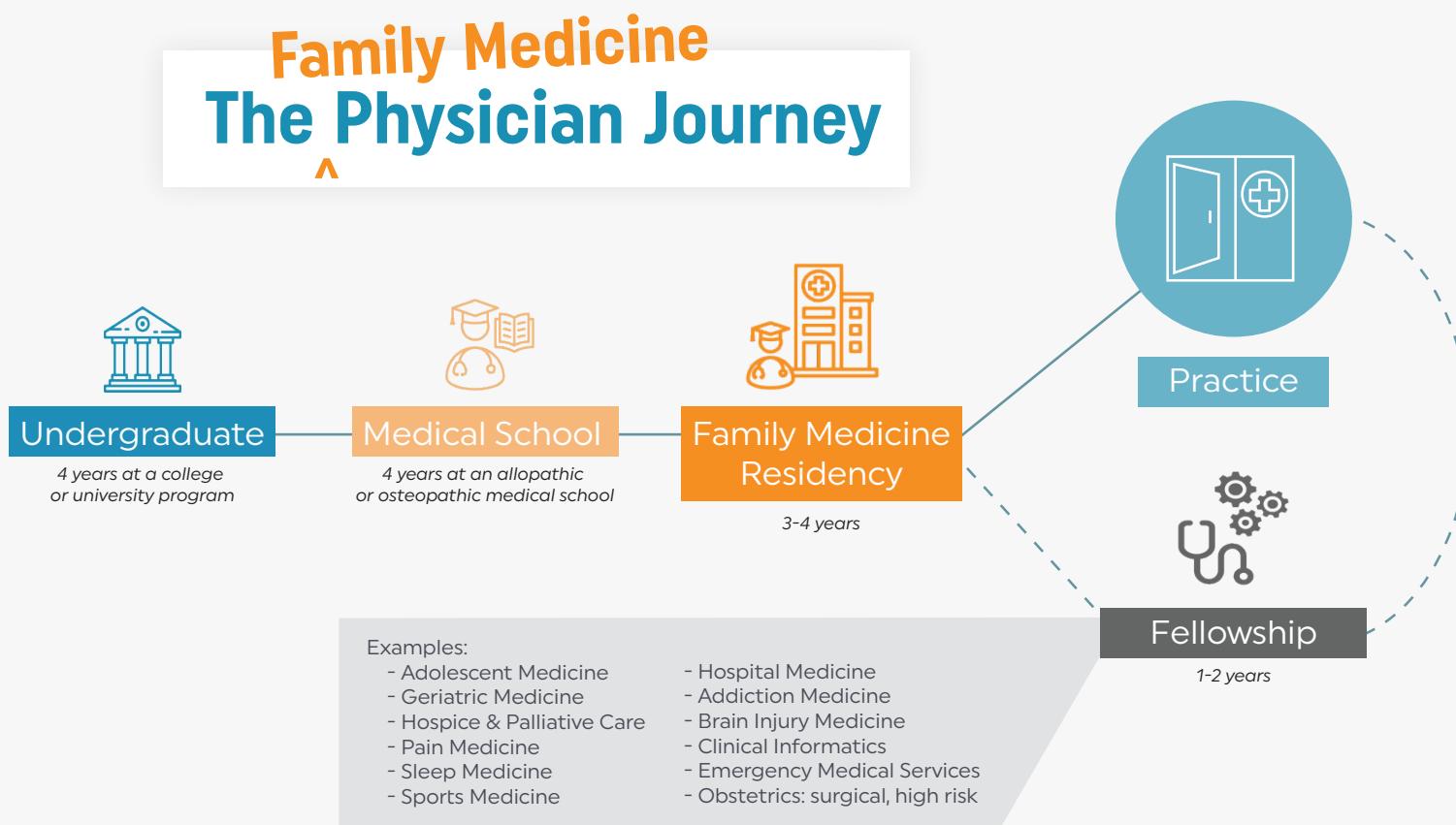
Medical School

After earning a bachelor's degree, future family physicians begin their training at an accredited allopathic or osteopathic school of medicine. Allopathic medical schools confer the doctor of medicine (MD) degree on their graduates, and osteopathic medical schools confer the doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO) degree. Medical students spend four years learning about the normal functioning of the human body, organ systems, disease entities and how to care for patients in many settings.

Everyone who graduates from medical school is considered a physician, having earned a doctorate-level degree in the field of medicine. However, to practice medicine in the United States, they must complete a medical residency, which is a required specialized training program in their specialty of choice. Medical students in their final year of medical school or previous medical school graduates apply to residency programs in their chosen specialty and then match to a program to start their specialized clinical training following medical school graduation.

Licensing Requirements

During medical school and residency, medical trainees are required to take and pass licensing examinations. Students at allopathic medical schools take Step 1 and Step 2 of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE). Students at osteopathic medical schools take Level 1 and Level 2 of the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination of the United States (COMLEX-USA). Medical students must also complete core periods of clinical instruction called clerkships. A student must pass both steps or levels of their required examination and meet their medical school's requirements for completing core science courses and clerkships, plus elective clinical rotations, to earn their MD or DO degree. Doing so entitles them to start specialized clinical training in a residency program.



Family Medicine Residency Training

Most family medicine residency programs last three years. Some family medicine residency programs offer a fourth year for resident physicians who have a strong interest in a particular area of medicine and want to receive additional training.

Family medicine residents are trained to care for all ages and all stages, focusing on continuity and care of patients over time. Specific requirements vary by residency program and may include required educational experiences in the following areas:

- Ambulatory medicine
- Community medicine
- Electives
- Geriatrics
- Health care systems
- Hospital medicine
- Musculoskeletal medicine
- Obstetrics-gynecology (OB-GYN)
- Pediatrics
- Sports medicine
- Surgery and specialty surgery

Fellowships

Beyond residency, family physicians who want to subspecialize in a particular area of medicine have numerous options for completing fellowship training, including the following:

- Adolescent medicine
- Clinical informatics
- Emergency medicine
- Faculty development
- Geriatrics
- Hospice and palliative medicine
- International medicine
- Research
- Rural medicine
- Sports medicine
- Substance abuse
- Women's health/OB-GYN

Career Options for Family Physicians

Family physicians can work in a variety of settings and choose from many different practice options.

Practice Settings	Practice Options
Community health centers	Direct primary care
Emergency rooms	Employed status
Hospitals	Multispecialty group practice
Nursing homes	Partnership
Office practices	Part-time or full-time practice
University-based health centers	Practice ownership: solo or group
Urgent care centers	Rural or urban practice

They are well trained to successfully pursue a wide range of clinical and nonclinical professional roles, including the following:

- Emergency medicine and urgent care
- Inpatient medicine
- International and wilderness medicine
- Medical education
- Pregnancy care
- Procedures
- Public health
- Research
- Sports medicine

Join the American Academy of Family Physicians

Looking for a partner in your family medicine journey? Join the AAFP and gain access to resources designed to help you along the way, plus the support and encouragement of thousands of family physicians practicing today. Medical students join for free!

Sign up today at aafp.org.