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Health Professions

The health professions pages offer a significant amount of information to help you prepare for graduate programs and careers in health. Please read these pages before making an appointment with any of the advisors listed in this section.

If you are interested in a career in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, osteopathic medicine, optometry or podiatry, set up an appointment to speak with the Director of the Medical Professions Advising Office (MPAO), Sheila Brachfeld-Child, who is in the Science Center. Please contact Karen Gurian, Coordinator of the MPAO, for information or to arrange an appointment in person or by phone with the Director.

To explore your interest in other health careers contact Ellie Perkins, Director of Fellowships and Preprofessional Programs; for public health, contact Ted Hufstader, Program Director, Internships.

Exploring Careers in Health

In order to make an educated decision about whether a career in health is a good option for you, become familiar with the range of healthcare career choices. Health careers may be divided into careers in medical professions (allopathic medicine, osteopathic medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, optometry and podiatry) and nursing, allied health careers, and public health, all of which include a number of job titles.

While the requirements can be demanding, with careful planning you can meet these demands, select any major you wish, and enjoy your Wellesley experience. Taking time to explore a variety of healthcare careers will assist you in making a wise decision about your future.

The CWS recommends the following steps to explore and define your interests in a health career:

- Read literature, talk with people, and obtain practical experience to learn about different types of health careers. Consult information on health-related careers as well as graduate schools and training programs. Read professional journals and periodicals in fields that interest you, and books that have been written about women and professionals in these areas. Check the admission requirements books for your chosen professions, e.g., the Association of American Medical College’s (AAMC) Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR); The American Dental Education Association’s ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools. Attend lectures and workshops. During the academic year, the CWS and the MPAO hold career exploration meetings on a wide variety of topics at which alumnae and others discuss their health careers.
- Experience in the various health occupations will help you test your strengths and weaknesses, develop specific interests and strengthen and differentiate your application to a graduate program. Initiate an information interview or a shadow experience using the Wellesley Network, the CWS Shadow Program for Health Careers, or health professionals you know. Further explore your field of interest through
internships, term-time work, summer jobs, and extracurricular or volunteer activities. The CWS Internship and Community Service Programs have information on a wide variety of opportunities available term-time, summer, and January in the local area and throughout the country. In addition, the AAMC web site lists summer enrichment programs, AAMC Tomorrow's Doctors Summer Programs; as does the Summer Medical and Dental Education Program (SMDEP). Also visit ExploreHealthCareers to research over 120 health careers.

Deciding Later: Post-Baccalaureate Programs

If you decide to enter a health career late in your undergraduate years and are unable to fulfill pre-med requirements before graduation, you might want to explore one of the many post-baccalaureate programs offered for completion of science requirements. These programs vary greatly in structure, criteria used in candidate selection, and successful placement of graduates into medical school. It is also possible to complete these courses individually at any accredited college or university. For a complete listing of programs, please see the AAMC Postbaccalaureate Premedical Programs.

Wellesley offers a small post-baccalaureate program where students with completed college degrees can take pre-health professional school course requirements in classes with undergraduate students. Applicants apply through the Admissions Office where applications are rigorously reviewed. Once accepted, post-baccalaureate students should consult the Director of Medical Professions Advising for help in planning a program suited to their individual needs.

The Application Process for Medical School

The Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) is under revision. Please check the medical professions sections below for updates.

The application process varies among different medical professions. While this section focuses on medical school, much of the information is appropriate to osteopathic medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, optometry, and podiatry. Wellesley College offers support to undergraduates and alumnae when they apply to these programs through its Medical Professions Advisory Committee (MPAC). Each applicant is paired with an individual MPAC member who, along with the Chair, is available throughout the application process. Committee members come from science and non-science departments throughout the college. In compliance with the expectations of these programs, the MPAC prepares a committee letter of reference for distribution to the individual schools.

Although applications to medical school are submitted the year before entrance, the MPAC process starts almost two years before entering medical school. In November 2012, the MPAC will begin working with applicants planning to apply for 2014 entrance to one of these medical professions. Please email the MPAC Coordinator, Karen Gurian, to request committee support. If you have any questions, please contact the Chair, Sheila Brachfeld-Child.
Selecting Schools: Apply Widely and Wisely

It is important to apply to a substantial number of schools. Successful applicants to medical schools from Wellesley usually apply to approximately 18-20 schools. There is, however, no magic number. As a rule, apply only to those schools that offer a program compatible with your interests and to which you have a reasonable chance of gaining admission. Check the individual schools’ websites and the AAMC’s Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) for information about the schools’ selection factors. Sheila Brachfeld-Child can help you choose schools that meet these criteria.

Factors to examine include:
- curriculum and pedagogical methods
- introduction to clinical work in the first or second year
- options for independent work, pass/fail grading
- number of electives
- opportunity for independent work
- community involvement
- record of graduates
- the school’s basic philosophy

By studying published data and visiting medical school websites, you can identify schools that have the type of program and curriculum that interests you. For example, some medical schools are known for training practicing M.D.’s, others for training research-oriented physicians or specialists. A number of medical schools offer varied degree programs in selected departments (e.g., M.D./Ph.D., M.D./M.P.H.).

A careful application can make a difference. The list of medical schools to which you apply should be the result of diligent research on your part. Generally, the following guidelines are helpful:
- Apply to your state medical school(s).
- Apply to the private schools in your state and/or region.
- Apply to a carefully considered group of private schools out of your state and region that vary in competitiveness for admissions.
- Apply to schools whose selection criteria fit your personal qualifications.
- Do not apply to state medical schools that take 90% state residents if you are not a resident of that state, unless you have some special qualifications such as grade point average, family, or personal history.
- Do not apply to so many schools that you cannot keep up with the supplemental application for each school.
- It is also important to check the profiles of entering classes of all state and private schools to which you apply and guard against choosing only schools that fit the same pattern of selection, such as a narrow range of GPAs and MCAT scores. In all cases, careful selection can improve your chance of acceptance.
State residency

State residency is probably the most influential factor in the school selection process. Applicants should always apply to public schools in their home state or regions since these schools give preference to state residents. In addition, since private schools get state funding and often give preference to state or regional residents, they are also a strong choice for application. Some state schools, such as the University of Massachusetts Medical School, will not even read applications from residents of another state. Others have a limited number of spaces allocated to students from particular states or give second preference to students from the region. When choosing medical schools, look carefully at the percentages of in-and out-of-state applicants accepted at each school, both public and private. The MSAR spells out these rates in detail. If you are not a resident of a state with a medical school, find out if an interstate agreement exists with medical schools in other states that give special consideration to applicants from your state. If you do not have state residency, careful application is even more important. Note: Legal definition of state residency varies from state to state. Therefore, it is best to check with a specific program concerning its residency requirements.

Enrollment as a full-time student in another state does not ordinarily affect resident status in your home state as long as you maintain your permanent address in that state. However, if you are planning to work out-of-state after college, be sure to verify your state residency. States have different policies about this. If you are in this position, carefully research medical school admissions, regional and state residency requirements, and contractual arrangements. Some states have more opportunities to study medicine than others.

Financial considerations are often the reason for applying to state schools. Many states have opened their doors to more out-of-state students; in addition, after completing one year of medical school, in some states, students are considered in-state residents for tuition payments. Check individual state policies.

Early Decision Programs

If you have a strong record and a particular interest in one school you may wish to apply through the Early Decision Program. Under this program, an application can be filed with only one school. Applications must be completed earlier than the deadline—usually by August 1—and the school promises a decision by October 1. The disadvantages of this plan lie in the necessity of submitting "late" applications to other schools if you are not accepted into your Early Decision program. If you wish to apply early decision, you must notify the MPAC in early June. This is essential because your committee letter will need to be written early.

Foreign Medical Schools

Many applicants consider applying to foreign medical schools as an alternative to U.S. schools. While some foreign medical schools offer a good education, other foreign medical schools open to U.S. citizens provide little or no personal attention and use teaching practices that are by no means equivalent to U.S. schools. Because the situation with foreign medical schools is complex, it is critical to discuss foreign medical schools directly with an advisor before applying. It is highly recommended that you visit any foreign medical school you are considering attending to be sure it is right for you. Ask detailed questions, e.g., how many students drop out or fail; what percentage of the class takes the U.S. medical boards “on time.” Ask questions about the island or country where you will be living.
**For Minority and Disadvantaged Students**

In recent years, medical schools throughout the U.S. have instituted special admissions programs and procedures designed to remedy the critical shortage of physicians who are historically underrepresented or economically disadvantaged. When applicants register for the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), they can declare their minority or disadvantaged status, and they will be included on the Medical Minority Applicant Register [Med-MAR], which will be circulated to all U.S. medical schools at no charge.

**For International Students**

International students may find it difficult to gain admission to U.S. medical schools. Even among those with extremely strong qualifications, the numbers admitted are discouragingly low. Good information about this process may be found in the MSAR. In addition, international students are advised to check with international Wellesley alumnae who are in U.S. schools and with their premedical advisor for advice. International students are not eligible for United States Government Loans, which provide the bulk of financial assistance for medical school. International applicants should be prepared to present detailed plans for financing their medical education. Some schools require that money be put into an escrow account at the beginning of medical school.

**Meeting Course Requirements**

*Preparation for medical school is addressed in this section primarily because it is fairly representative of procedures for the other health professions.*

Each school of medicine has its own set of course requirements. Please note that the requirements for medical schools are currently in flux as schools around the country are re-examining their entrance requirements, particularly in light of the new Medical College Admissions Test that begins in spring 2015.

Please contact Sheila Brachfeld-Child for further information and refer to this section for updates. *In general,* the following courses meet minimum requirements for most programs:

- Biology: one year with laboratory
- Inorganic Chemistry: one year with laboratory
- Organic Chemistry: one year with laboratory
- Physics: one year with laboratory
- English: one year; both composition and literature may be required (a course in Wellesley's Writing Program fulfills one semester of this requirement)
- Mathematics: one year, a semester of calculus and a semester of statistics are recommended
- Biochemistry: an increasing number of schools are requiring it and it is expected for the Medical College Admission Test beginning in spring 2015

The Association of American Medical Colleges is currently revising the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), which will be implemented in spring 2015. Among the changes, there will be a new section that will "test your knowledge and use of the concepts in psychology, sociology, and biology that provide a solid foundation for learning in medical school about the behavioral and socio-cultural determinants of health." Students can find more information about
the changes to the MCAT in the 2015 MCAT Preview Guide. Please check for updates as we continue to provide new information about the relevant courses and changes to the MCAT as it becomes available.

Requirements for particular schools and programs vary, and some medical schools have additional requirements, such as an extra year of biology or specific biology courses. Schools encourage students to take several courses in the social sciences, particularly as they relate to the social, psychological, ethical, political, and economic influences on healthcare delivery systems. It is imperative that you research the individual schools’ websites and the standard admissions guides in your field, such as the MSAR, or the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools. For example, students interested in medical school should purchase the Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR), an online resource available from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC).

No specific major (science or non-science) is required for medical school. However, if you are a non-science major and you have completed all requirements early in your college years, you should continue to take science courses to keep your knowledge current and demonstrate your interest in science.

Students who are eligible to receive Advanced Placement credit in the required courses are advised to use the equivalent time for advanced work in the same field. In the sciences, check Wellesley’s course catalogue for alternative introductory courses for students with high scores on the AP exam. Individual questions about course placement should be directed to the relevant departments. Many professional schools specifically require college-level courses in particular disciplines and will not accept AP credits as fulfillment of some or any of their requirements.

If you are considering a career in the health now, it is particularly important that you complete (or be completing) the basic science requirements before taking the MCAT or other standardized tests. Also, in addition to taking a first-year writing course and an additional English course to fulfill the requirements, we suggest that you take English courses or writing-intensive courses in other fields to improve your ability to read, comprehend, and express your ideas clearly. In planning an undergraduate academic program, it is important to begin early to fulfill the minimum science requirements and to keep your options open for selecting a major. Be aware of the degree distribution requirements and confirm that you are fulfilling them as outlined in the college catalogue.

Students and alumnae planning to apply to the fields of medicine, osteopathic medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, optometry, or podiatry, must contact Karen Gurian, Coordinator of the Medical Professions Advising Office, as early as possible in order to be placed on a mailing list.

Financing Medical School

Tuition and expenses for medical school have increased dramatically in the past decade. Familiarize yourself early with the costs of medical school education and sources of financial aid. The actual process of applying for and securing financial aid, however, cannot be initiated until after you are accepted into a medical school. At that time, contact the financial aid officers at the medical school. Request complete, up-to-date information about estimated costs,
including: tuition, fees, supplies, and living costs, the types of assistance available and the
financial aid application process. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has
created an outstanding site on financing medical school.

There are two major types of financial aid: scholarships, which do not have to be repaid, and
loans, which must be repaid. The amount of loan money available, the interest rate, and the
terms of repayment of loan programs differ and should be carefully evaluated. Much of the loan
money from the federal government is given directly to the medical school(s) which, in turn,
awards aid to medical students (e.g., Health Professions Student Loan Program). Other federal
programs encourage banks and other private lending institutions to make loans to medical
students (e.g., Health Education Assistance Loan Programs, Guaranteed Student Loan
Programs).

There are also programs that finance medical school education in return for repayment in the
form of service after the receipt of the M.D. degree; the most prominent of these is the Armed
Forces Health Professions Scholarships Program. When considering these programs, investigate
them fully to understand the details of the contract before committing yourself.

Many states have programs of financial assistance available to state residents. For information,
contact the medical school financial aid officer or the State Department of Education.

Loans and scholarship funds are also available to medical students from a variety of
philanthropic, civic, and medical organizations. In most cases an application is made directly to
the agency. Although these sources of financial aid are not administered by the medical schools,
the applicant can obtain information about them from the medical school financial aid offices, or
by writing directly to the agencies (e.g., American Medical Association, American Medical
Women’s Association, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, National Medical Fellowships,
Inc.).

Financial aid assistance is usually awarded on the basis of demonstrated need. Typically
students must provide the same information required by undergraduate financial aid officers.
Financial aid offices generally request the following information: amount of financial resources
available, income and assets of parents (regardless of age, marital status, and prior independent
status of applicants), and a proposed budget for the coming year.

Selected Internet and CWS Library Resources

- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)
- Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) (available online for fee from the
  AAMC; print version available on reserve in the CWS Library)
- Minority Student Opportunities in United States Medical Schools 2009 (available for
  $15 on the AAMC website)
The Application Process for Nursing, Allied Health Professions and Public Health

Nursing and allied health professions represent a large group of health careers including physical therapists, dieticians, genetic counselors, physician assistants, occupational therapists, and pharmacists. Healthcare is a highly collaborative field, requiring health professionals to work with medical doctors to function smoothly. These allied health professionals comprise about 60% of all healthcare careers. In fact, 50% of the 30 fastest growing occupations for 2002-2012 are in the allied health professions. Not only is demand increasing for these health professionals, but there is also a shortage in supply.

Many programs recommend or require experience in the healthcare field. This is to ensure that you, as the applicant, are sure of your career decision and also understand your role in the healthcare system. The amount and type of experience can vary from program to program, but there is usually some consistency within each profession. Programs also require GRE scores for application and one must plan ahead to ensure scores are available in time for the application deadline. Interviews may or may not be a part of the application process and it is necessary to check each program of interest.

To explore programs, use the links in the “Recommended Resources for Allied Health Professions” section, along with your own research. When examining an individual program’s prerequisites, you will notice that there is some variation in the courses required for admission. Prerequisites for some allied health programs, such as physician assistant programs, may resemble medical school prerequisites.

When choosing a program, take cost into account. Like undergraduate public college and university programs, many allied health programs offer less expensive tuition for in-state students. Loans, as well as financial aid opportunities, are available to accepted students.

The Application Timeline for Allied Health Schools

Application deadlines vary from program to program, but generally deadlines are in the fall. For the various allied health fields, admission requirements and deadlines are more similar to graduate schools in the arts and sciences.

Nursing
Description: Nurses treat patients and provide emotional support to patients and their families; nurses also educate the community about healthcare and medical conditions. An extremely important part of the healthcare system, they are currently in short supply. Since nurses are in high demand, there are wonderful job opportunities available. Along with the many job openings, there are also many options within the nursing profession, including varying degrees of specialty and licensure.
Education: The basic degree is that of the registered nurse (RN). The next degree is a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN). Accelerated MSN programs are ideal for liberal arts college graduates who typically take three to four years to complete the accelerated MSN, earning both the BSN and the MSN during this time. Advanced-level practice specialities requiring an MSN include clinical nurse specialist (CNS), certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA), and certified nurse midwife (CNM). A nurse practitioner (NP) can provide complete primary care to patients who are not critically ill, supervised minimally by an M.D. A relatively new degree, the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP or DrNP) requires further schooling after the MSN degree. The Doctor of Nursing Science (DNS) and the PhD in nursing allow for more research-oriented work. Nursing clearly has many opportunities for advancement and flexibility, making it an attractive option among the health professions.

Masters of Science in Nursing (MSN) programs also do not require previous healthcare experience; however, experience is an attractive addition to your application. Admissions officers like to see that applicants have explored their options, and understand their career decision.

Prerequisites for MSN programs often contain a few courses that are also required for medical school admissions, although the list is not as extensive and often less rigorous. Prerequisites for MSN programs vary by program, and some schools, such as MGH Institute of Health Professions, offer the option of taking prerequisite courses after admission. Other factors to consider include cost and location. There are scholarships and loans available for admitted students, though few institutions offer in-state tuition rates.

Application deadlines vary by program, and range from a fall deadline, to the beginning of the calendar year.

Places of Employment: Hospitals, clinics, nursing care facilities, medical offices, schools and many other settings. Home health and public health nurses travel to various sites.

Graduate school resources:
- [American Association of Colleges of Nursing](#)
- [American Academy of Nurse Practitioners](#)
- [Directory of graduate programs for non-nursing college graduates](#)
- [Nursing News, Jobs, and Continuing Education](#)
- [U.S. News and World Report Graduate Nursing School Rankings (2011)](#)

Athletic Training

Description: Athletic trainers prevent, diagnose, assess, treat, and rehabilitate muscle and bone injuries and illnesses. When working at competitions, athletic trainers are the first healthcare professionals at the scene when an injury occurs. This means they must be able to recognize, evaluate, and assess injuries and provide immediate care when needed.

Education: Some institutions offer a bachelor’s degree in athletic training. Though many jobs require or desire those with a master’s degree or higher.
**Places of employment:** High schools, colleges and universities, professional teams, hospitals, private practice, and fitness and recreational sports centers. Travel is often a part of the athletic trainer career.

**Graduate school resource:**
- [National Athletic Trainers’ Association](https://www.nata.org)

**Chiropractic**

**Description:** Chiropractors treat health problems of the musculoskeletal system. The chiropractic treatment philosophy is that spinal joint misalignments interfere with the nervous system and can result in lower resistance to disease and many different conditions of diminished health. They take the patient’s health history, conduct physical, orthopedic, and neurological exams, and often use x-rays and other diagnostic images to help diagnose and treat the patient. Manual manipulations are often part of the course of treatment.

**Education:** Chiropractic colleges offer 4 years of education and training leading to a Doctor of Chiropractic (DC) degree. These programs require a bachelor’s degree and sometimes courses in the sciences, including anatomy, physiology, public health, microbiology, pathology, and biochemistry.

**Places of employment:** Most chiropractors own a practice, and sometimes are part of a group practice. Hospitals and clinics are also places of employment. Very few chiropractors work in education and research.

**Graduate school resources:**
- [American Chiropractic Association](https://www.aca.org)
- [Association of Chiropractic Colleges](https://www.chirocolleges.com)

**Nutrition**

**Description:** Registered Dietitians are trained in the nutritional needs of both healthy people and those suffering from sickness or disease. They help plan healthy diets.

**Education:** There are 18 master’s degree programs in the U.S.; all are two years in length.

**Places of employment:** Hospitals, nursing care facilities, outpatient care centers, and offices of physicians or other health practitioners. Business dieticians can be employed by corporations, in hospitality management, and in food service.

**Graduate school resource:**
- [The American Society for Nutritional Sciences](https://www.amsn.org)
**Occupational Therapy**

**Description:** Occupational therapists (OTs) work with patients to improve their ability to perform daily tasks in living and work environments. Patients often suffer from a mental, physical, developmental, or emotionally disabling condition. OTs work with these patients to develop and teach techniques which allow them to perform necessary tasks.

**Education:** OT programs last 2 years. Many programs require a minimum of 24 weeks of supervised fieldwork. Prerequisites include biology, chemistry, physics, health, art, and social sciences. These programs also appreciate experience in the healthcare field.

**Places of employment:** Rehabilitation centers, private practice, and hospitals.

**Graduate school resource:**
- [American Occupational Therapy Association](https://www.aota.org)

**Physical Therapy**

**Description:** Physical therapists (PTs) evaluate and diagnose movement dysfunction and use interventions to treat patients. Physical therapists create a rehabilitation plan for each patient to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability.

**Education:** PT programs are 2 to 2.5 years in length. Some of the prerequisites for these programs may include biology, anatomy, chemistry, physics, social science, mathematics, and statistics. These programs may also require some experience in a healthcare environment for admittance. It is also possible for PTs to get a doctoral degree with 3 more years of schooling.

**Places of employment:** PTs work in hospitals, outpatient clinics, and private offices.

**Graduate school resources:**
- [American Physical Therapy Association](https://www.apta.org)

**Physician Assistant**

**Description:** Physician assistants (PAs) are trained to provide diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventative healthcare services under the supervision of a physician. They work in many specialties, including general internal medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, thoracic surgery, emergency medicine, orthopedics, and geriatrics.

**Education:** Physician assistant masters programs are 2 years long and require prerequisite courses similar to what medical schools require.

**Places of employment:** Private practice, clinics, hospitals, colleges and universities, and professional schools.

**Graduate school resources:**
- [American Academy of Physician Assistants](https://www.aapa.org)
Public Health

Description: The field of Public Health examines ways to improve health outcomes and quality of life in communities through a broad array of prevention efforts, policy change, and research. Public health draws on an interdisciplinary knowledge base across many academic disciplines. Due to increasing demands for quality health care throughout the world, the need for professionals trained in these fields will continue to grow.

Education: Public health graduate programs offer degrees to a wide range of individuals. Some programs are designed specifically for doctors, nurses, or nutritionists who, as specialists, want to focus on a particular aspect of public health or want to build their epidemiological research skills. Other programs are designed for people without a medical degree who are interested in entering the field of public health and/or are public health practitioners looking to sharpen their skills. Admission requirements for schools of public health are structured to meet the needs of each autonomous department and students interested in specific programs should carefully research the criteria of those departments within schools of public health. Public health schools teach methods of improving general health conditions in the community through programs such as:

- Epidemiology & Biostatistics
- Community Health & Sociomedical Sciences
- Environmental & Occupational Health
- Public Health Policy

Public health graduate schools that are members of the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) go through rigorous accreditation and review. Schools of public health may stand alone or may be affiliated with preventive medicine divisions of medical schools or in the arts and sciences schools of universities. The traditional degree granted in two-year programs is an M.P.H (Master of Public Health); however, other programs of varying length grant an M.S., M.S.P.H., M.H.S., a D.r.P.H. or a Ph.D. degree.

Many schools use the Schools of Public Health Application Service (SOPHAS) to process their applications. Students need to be aware of SOPHAS and school specific deadlines. Many times, application documents must be submitted to SOPHAS well in advance of the graduate school deadline.

Graduate school resources:

- American Public Health Association
- Association of Schools of Public Health
- Public health career information
- Schools of Public Health Application Service (SOPHAS)
Resources for Allied Health Professions

- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs
- Careers in Allied Health
- Explore Health Careers
- Northeast Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (NEAHP)
- Occupational Outlook Handbook

For funding resources, see Fellowships/Scholarships and Financing Your Education.