



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR PLANNING YOUR MEDICAL CAREER: AN INFORMATION BOOKLET

This booklet is intended to assist students' decision making and career choices to improve the match between students' ability and passion and program expectations. The congruence between the capabilities and passion of the students, and requirements of the study program has 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 own natural abilities, personalities, values, circumstances and their suitability for a caring profession.

In this booklet you will find some basic information which will help guide you through your career choice. You will find medical students' and doctors' reflections on medical career and their experiences as a student and practitioner, as well as expectations of clients and medical educators, which you may find useful for your career choice decision making.





CAREER CHOICE DECISION MAKING STAGES

Try structuring your career decision making to encompass the following stages:

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is the first step in career planning and it means finding out more about your ability and demands of a career. It is worth taking time to carry out your own self-assessment as it can reveal many of your personal characteristics and help define your strengths and weaknesses. Explore your career values, motivators, preferences, personal strengths and limitations. Looking for similarities between your abilities and the demands of the career you are considering is an essential element of your career planning. You may use career planning tools like **Myers Briggs** which could help you understand yourself better and can point you in the direction of a career that might suit you. Understanding these will help guide your exploration into the many different career options available to you.

Career exploration

Careful research into your career options is important. Establish your options, alternatives and plan Bs, gather information, network and reality check. Speak to medical students, doctors and other health care professionals in order to gain as many insights as possible. Think carefully about whether you can see yourself succeeding on that career path. Whatever your reason for thinking medicine is your future, it is important to realize that there are other allied health sciences and fields of study that would fulfil your motives and a life following one of these different paths could be just as rewarding. And never, ever be without a plan B.

Decision making

You should now have an idea of things like your interests and skills and the things that matter to you most about a career. You may have also identified some career expectations/roles and may find yourself drawn to a particular area. It is now time to act on what you already know and make some clearer choices.

Adopted from UK foundation, Program Office with some modification



WHAT MOTIVATES STUDENTS TO CHOOSE MEDICAL CAREER?

Choosing a career is one of the most difficult choices a student can make. Your motivation, goals, interests, morals and values are major factors that influence the kind of career you decide to pursue. The important thing is to have a firm idea of what it takes to enter the profession you desire. Students have differing motivations for choosing a medical career. For many students desire for helping people, exciting career, admired and trusted profession, ongoing learning of new skills, high level of responsibility and rewarding profession may be an important motivating factor in career choice (Blundell et al. 2007, Gasiorowski et al 2014, Kooshki et al 2016).

Speak to as many students, doctors and other healthcare professionals, family members and peers in order to gain as many opinions as possible. Ask individuals to justify their reasoning for choosing medicine as a career and to explain why they would or would not recommend it. But remember that the final decisions need to be an individual one. People closest to the student, such as family and peers, have major influences on career choices. They influence students both by their opinions of specific career paths, where they feel the student would best fit based on their behaviors at school and home. Many students feel like their career choice is not simply their own decision and may end up dropping out of medical training. Seek information but try not to be pressured into studying medicine by your family/peers – it is you and only you know your strengths and weaknesses (Blundell et al. 2007).

We asked medical students from Jimma, Axum, Hawassa, and Gondar universities “what motivated them to become a medical student”. Many motivating factors were cited for choosing a medical career such as the desire for helping people, individual experience of illness, interest in biological knowledge, to have respected status in society,



better salary, peer and family pressure and their admiration for relatives or family and friends already working in the field, among others

Bethel Solomon, a 3rd year medical student at Hawassa University said:

I joined medical school because of my interest in biology; I am fascinated by human body structure and the mechanism how it works. And also the desire to help others and the work of medical doctors inspired me to choose a medical career.

Mitiku Belachew, a 4th year medical student in Gondar University said:

I have heard medicine is a challenging career and I am pretty fascinated by a challenging and tough career. Serving my country as a medical doctor was also the main reason to choose a medical career



Mitiku Belachew



Some students choose medicine from their personal experience of illness. Meron Ayele, a medical intern at Hawassa University became interested in medical career after she underwent appendectomy. She said:

When I was 8 years old I had an appendectomy and stayed in the hospital for a week. Since then I was passionate about surgery. I wanted to be like him and save lives

Similarly, Bethel Gezahegn 4th year medical student at Hawassa University said:

I have always thought myself as a doctor. Even I did not know what my second option would be if I was not lucky to join medicine. I think this passion is created when I was a child. I had frequent illnesses and have a brother who is autistic. So I wanted to make a difference in preventing and treating childhood illness.

Remember that you have to create a complete picture of the career in which you will be working and studying. Careful exploration of career options is important.

Students were asked, “Would you still choose a career in medicine if you had a chance to choose again?”

Yunus, a 4th year medical student at Jimma University said:

I would never choose it again because it is not like what I thought and what I was told about. I found it very challenging and time consuming.

Mohammed Hussen, 3rd year medical student at Jimma University said:

Actually I may not choose it again if I had another opportunity, because studying medicine needs much time, much energy and is stressful



PERSONALITY TRAITS

Some students may not be suited to a career in medicine, even though they have achieved the necessary academic scores. If you are considering a career in medicine, apart from academic excellence it is necessary to determine that you have the necessary personal qualities, not just for the university course but also in the longer term. The majority of students have no idea what university and a career in medicine will be like. 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. Some of the most common personality traits deemed important for medical profession are being emotionally stable and resilient, caring, respectful and compassionate to almost every one, handling stress well, being assertive, self-conscious and cooperative with others, patience, good communication skills, integrity, and willingness to learn from others and work in teams. These personality traits are not only important for working within the medical field, but are even important indicators of who has better chance of succeeding in medical school.

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**.

Dr. Ephrem G/hare, Academic Dean, Assistant Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at Hawassa University said:

Medicine is not a field where only bright and high scoring students join. It is a field which needs hard work, patience, good communication skill, endurance and above all commitment to community service.

Dr. Mezgebu Silamsaw Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine, Director of School of Medicine at Gondar University said:

Since medical doctors are always working with patients to relieve their suffering, treat disease and prevent ill health, apart from



academic achievement they should be caring, respectful, compassionate, ethical, work in a team, organized, able to put extra effort to their work with good coping mechanism and should have a passion towards medical profession.



Dr. Mezgebu Silamsaw

Lucas Dola, 3rd year medical student at Hawassa University said:

In these 3 years I have seen the challenges of medical education. I recommend students not to join this field for money and to have a respected position in the society. I have seen many students including my friends are frustrated and lost motivation due to a lot of ups and downs. They found it much harder than they expected. I say only those students who have the passion to help sick people and serve society should join the field. I have seen passion to serve the society, persistence and the desire to learn new things is the core for success in medical education.

Ato Abajifar Sheki who was attending treatment at Jimma University Hospital said:



Ato Abajifar Sheki

"I like to be treated by a medical doctor who quickly understands my feelings and health problems and who is caring, kind and respectful."

CHALLENGES IN MEDICAL CAREER

There is no doubt that a career as a doctor can be rewarding and exciting, but remember that it is also tough, stressful, challenging, strenuous, competitive, and needs hard work and high pass grades. Being a medical student will involve working harder than your peers in other fields. It is a 5 or 6 year program, where in your final few years holidays become a lot shorter and you are studying almost all years. There are generally more contact hours than other fields with lectures, independent study, seminars, small group discussions, laboratory work, clinical rotations and community attachment taking up a great deal of time. Long hours of independent reading is required to acquire broad and deep knowledge. You also have to spend several hours in health facilities and laboratories to develop practical skills. And keeping on top of it all can be a challenge. There is also pressure to pass the written, oral and practical exams. Passing these exams often require cramming a great deal of knowledge in a small space of time and this can be stressful, but the result can be rewarding (Blundell et al, 2007).

Many students acknowledged that studying medicine is long and stressful and sometimes they feel sad for choosing medicine as a career.



Tadelu Mekonen, a medical intern at Hawassa University said:

The most challenging part of medical training is that the amount of knowledge one is supposed to know is huge and difficult to cope with. It makes you busy and you can't get time to spend with family and friends as you want.

Misomsa Dagne, a 4th year medical student at Jimma University said:



Misomsa Dagne

"I felt sad for choosing medicine at times when I had so many patients but was not able to clerk all, was not able to read about all cases and was not able to answer questions I have been asked. I also felt sad when I saw my friends who went into other disciplines graduated and when I couldn't get enough sleep but still did not finish what I intended to finish.

Tariku Hussen, 5th year medical student in Gondar University said:

I was sad for choosing medicine when I was far away from my family for a year without break including holidays with endless exams. However, the science of medicine is amazing and is all about treating sick people and relieving their pain. I found this part satisfying and makes me stick to it.



Dr Mahlet Tesfaye, general and cardiothoracic surgeon, head of department of surgery at Jimma University said:

The most difficult challenge of a medical career is the long hours you have to put in to become a good physician, the long duty hours you have to endure, being on duty/call that demand you to sacrifice not only your life but also your family life, the imbalance between the pay and the things you endure- seeing your friends work less and get paid more-, facing patients loss and patients who are terminally ill. However, being able to help patients and supporting them through difficult times and seeing them get better and teaching medical students and helping them to aspire to become a good physician are rewarding.



Dr Mahlet Tesfaye

Similarly Dr. Yeshiwas Abebaw, Obstetrician, Obstetrics and Gynecology department head at Gondar University said:



Dr. Yeshiwas Abebaw

"The main challenge in medical career is shortage of time for social interaction, starting personal life late, not being able to help people as you desired due to variety of shortcomings in the health institutions and medico-legal issues. But I am satisfied helping people in need and when seeing someone I helped is getting better and getting patient trust"

When questioned about what makes them to stick to the medical education, the responses were seeking a better future, the hope of becoming a doctor, passion/interest towards medical profession, promise to family and relatives to become a dedicated doctor, considering the only career option, loving reading and knowing new things and the desire to help others.

Adino Tesfaw, medical intern at Hawassa University, said the most important thing that make him to stick to medical training is passion for the career. He said:

I know that medical school is difficult and stressful but if you have a passion to help others you will do it.

Bilisom Balcha, a 4th year medical student at Jimma University said:

I think medical school requires a lot of reading and self-effort as well as commitment, but being able to help people makes me to stick to it.



The advantages of being a medical doctor may be many, such as ability to provide service and support to others, saving lives, continuous learning, respected profession, virtual guarantee of job following graduation, and good career prospects. However, with these advantages come responsibility and some disadvantages like long study duration, long study hours, and lots of exams, risk of mistakes, stressful periods, dealing with death/suffering, being sued, late work hours and erratic shift timings, and dealing with immensely stressful situations on an ongoing basis.

Elilta Desta, 4th year medical student at Gondar University explained that:

Among the many things I like about medical profession and found rewarding is that being able to help patients and seeing them getting better and being thankful. However, there are times I feel frustrated due to long study hours, a lot of exams, and time constraints for family and social interaction.



Elilta Desta



Similarly Dr. Abraham Agidew, Internist at Jimma University said:



Dr. Abraham Agidew

"The positive aspects of being a medical doctor is really incredible and amazing. There is nothing in this world that is more than helping a patient. But to get this positive aspect of satisfaction we have to be academically efficient and ethically disciplined, be empathetic, humble and always stand in the front line helping patients than chasing money."

In conclusion, before deciding to join medical schools you have to carefully assess your ability, circumstances and your suitability for a caring profession. Studying medicine requires working harder on average than most other students to master both the science and art of modern medicine. There is a lot of information you will need to learn in a very short time, and you also will be expected to retain a lot of it for internal and external exam and for your future patient care. 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 working hours with patients, then you've applied to the right profession.

THE MEDICAL COLLEGES

The decision to study medicine is just the beginning. Now it is necessary to decide which university. Ethiopia has 28 public and 6 private medical colleges. It is likely you will have a great time at whichever institution you find yourself. The 14 public and 6 private medical colleges take students directly from preparatory schools based on students' achievement on University Entrance Examination (UEE). They have a six years curriculum. Similarly, St. Paul Millennium Medical College recruit students based on UEE, admission test and interview results. The college uses a 5 year curriculum.

The 14 Public medical colleges are:-

- AddisAbaba University
- Adigrat University
- Arba-Minch University
- Arsi University
- Bahir-Dar University
- Debre Tabor University
- Gondar University
- Haramaya University
- Hawassa University
- Jigiga University
- Jimma University
- Mekelle University
- Wachamo University
- Welketie University



Private Medical Colleges

- Ayat Medical College
- Sante Medical College
- Bethel Medical College
- Africa Health Science College
- Myungsung Medical College
- Adama General Hospital and Medical College (Adama)
- Gambi Medical College (B/Dar)

The rest 13 public medical colleges enroll first degree holder students who have health and basic natural science backgrounds based on their undergraduate GPA, year of service, and results of admission test and interview. This curriculum is delivered over four and half years' time. They are:-

- Ambo University
- Axum University
- Debre Birhan University
- Dire- Dawa University
- Debre- Markose University
- Dill University
- Meda-Welabu University
- Wollo University
- Wolayita Sodo University
- Wollega University
- Adama Hospital Medical College
- Yirgalem Hospital Medical College
- Yekatit 12 Hospital Medical College



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