

Exploring Options

Good career decisions require good information. With more than 100 specialty and fellowship areas to choose from in your medical career, trying to make a decision without some good information can be difficult. While you may certainly have some specialty areas in mind, how much do you really know about those areas? What other types of information should you seek before you make a decision? What other specialty options exist that you didn't know about?

The types of information you will be seeking includes:

- Information about the nature of the work
- Characteristics of people in those positions
- Any training/residency requirements particular to the specialty
- Employment outlook (salary and workforce projections)
- Major issues facing professionals in the field
- Types of associations and organizations that exist
- Contacts and leads for networking and informational interviewing

The first step is to begin gathering basic information about all specialties and practice alternatives available. At this time you should be learning about the nature of the work, what types of people can be found in that field, and whether their personal characteristics (interests, values, and personality styles) fit with yours. As you review this information you will be able to make some initial decisions, and begin to eliminate those fields and specialties that are obvious mismatches.

As you learn more about the specialty areas under consideration, you need to look closely at the nature of the work and consider your preferences for different aspects of the work, such as:

- Inpatient vs. outpatient services
- Working with different age ranges
- Working with one or both genders
- Experience with general practice vs. a specialty
- Breadth vs. depth of patient problems
- Short-term vs. long-term/continuous care
- Direct vs. indirect communication
- Contact with family members vs. direct contact with patients

Your clinical experiences are an important tool for exploring and evaluating specialty choice. As you go through them, take a look at your top values, your environmental factors and practice needs, and consider how each rotation “fits.”

Resources for Exploring Options

Online Research

www.aamc.org/careersinmedicine

Careers in Medicine Specialty Pages—The Web site has specialty information pages on 112 specialties and subspecialties that include the nature of the work, personal characteristics (including interests, values and personality), training and residency information, match data, workforce statistics, salary information, and links to over 1,000 journals, publications, and specialty and academic societies. You must register and login to access these pages.

www.ama-assn.org/go/freida

AMA's Fellowship and Residency Electronic Interactive Database Access (FREIDA) On-line—FREIDA provides statistical information about each specialty, as well as information about ACGME accredited residency programs and institutional offerings by specialty and geographic location.

www.aafp.org/x20259.xml

Strolling Through the Match—The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) provides this valuable medical career planning site which “was developed to help medical students become more knowledgeable and better prepared to make appropriate decisions concerning their professional careers and the process of obtaining post-graduate training.”

www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/7247.html

Choosing a Medical Specialty—The AMA provides this bibliography of links for more information on specialty areas. It includes links to the AMA web pages for 102 specialties.

Books

Bolles, R.N. (2005). *What Color is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*. Berkeley, CA: TenSpeed Press.

Freeman, B. (2004). *The Ultimate Guide to Choosing a Medical Specialty*. New York: Lange Medical Books/McGraw-Hill.

Iseron, K.V. (2003). *Iseron's Getting into a Residency, A Guide for Medical Students, 6th Edition*. Tucson, AZ: Galen Press, Ltd.

Taylor, A.D. (2003). *How to Choose a Medical Specialty, 4th Edition*. Philadelphia, PA:W.B. Saunders Company.