

Successful Networking and Informational Interviewing

Networking is an ongoing process of building professional contacts. The goal is to build relationships for the purpose of obtaining information, professional development and personal growth. One of the more successful ways to gain information and create contacts is through informational interviewing. These interviews differ greatly from job interviews. Their purpose is purely informational so you, the interviewer can learn firsthand and get a realistic picture of what it is like to perform a particular type of work or practice in a particular setting. You may also get good ideas and feedback about summer or research opportunities in the fields you are considering.

Myths about networking

“No one will speak with me; they won’t have time.”

This is a frequent concern of students but the fact is that most of the people you are talking to have been sitting in the same place you are right now. Most people will be willing to help if you are professional about your request and stick to a specific agenda, asking good questions.

“I don’t know anyone who can help me.”

You don’t have to know someone who is practicing in the specialty you are researching, but rather you need to think about who may be able to assist you with making a contact. Examples include professors, physician and resident contacts from clerkships, student affairs administrators, fellow students, family, academic or specialty societies, and alumni.

“I can get the same information from the Internet/books/journals.”

No matter how comprehensive and well organized the information you have gathered may be, it is a two-dimensional picture of the profession.

Tips for Successful Informational Interviewing

- Conduct a thorough self-assessment before you start more in-depth career exploration. Your contacts will want to know your interests and background.
- You will be meeting to gather up-to-date information about an area of interest. You are not asking the person for a job.
- Respect the person’s time and plan a manageable agenda. Make an appointment if possible and stick to the allotted time. 20-30 minutes is usually adequate.
- Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation; remember that you are the interviewer.
- Prepare in advance with specific questions and know the basics about the specialty so you can ask more in-depth questions. There are sample questions for informational interviewing on the reverse side.
- Be sure to send a thank-you letter following an informational interview.
- Keep in touch with your contacts, especially if you believe they may have taken an interest in your career.

Informational Interview Questions

Following are questions you might consider asking a practitioner to get more information on the specialties you are considering.

1. How did you choose this specialty?
2. Why did you choose this specialty?
3. What do you like most about the specialty?
4. What do you like least about the specialty?
5. What are the various practice settings for this specialty?
6. What are some of the hot topics or challenges facing physicians in this specialty?
7. What are the most important attributes that program directors may be seeking for future physicians in this specialty?
8. What is a typical day like in your practice?
9. How do you balance your career with the rest of your life?
10. What is the salary range for residencies/entry-level positions, and for mid-level/senior positions?
11. What unique or unadvertised specialty associations and local contacts exist?
12. Are there other recommendations you would make to a new physician considering this specialty?
13. What attributes do you think are important in anyone considering this specialty?
14. If you had it to do over again would you choose this specialty? Why/why not?
15. Who else would you suggest I speak with? May I let them know you referred me?