Career advising guide for MD students
Introduction

Student Services

Student Services works to ensure that undergraduate medical students are able to realize their full potential as learners and individuals. Our services are provided on a confidential basis, and we offer a safe place for students to seek support when they have academic or personal issues.

We give students the help they need to seek out resources and support around mental and physical health, mistreatment and discrimination, disabilities, financial planning and career advising. Student Services also strives to ensure an overall supportive academic environment that is conducive to scholastic achievement and personal growth.

Student Services encompasses a number of specific support and information groups including the Office of Student Affairs, Aboriginal Student Services, and the Office of Career Advising and Mentorship. We work closely with the Disability Student Services at the University of Saskatchewan and the Physician Health Program at the Saskatchewan Medical Association.

The College of Medicine supports all elements of career planning, mentoring programs and the residency match process through the Office of Career Advising and Mentorship (OCA&M) for current undergraduate MD students.

The office provides everything from confidential advising appointments to events designed to facilitate mentorship relationships in the community.

We work in close collaboration with a variety of medical community partners such as the Physician Recruitment Agency of Saskatchewan (saskdocs.ca) and the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) to effectively assist medical students in choosing elective courses, evaluating career options and applying to residency programs.

The OCA&M integrates the efforts of faculty members, directors of required clinical learning experiences and student services staff. We offer each student access to Careers in Medicine, a comprehensive online repository of curated tools, guides, databases and resources designed for medical students and residents.

Using the Careers in Medicine career planning model, students can collect and interpret information about themselves, understand their options, make decisions, and take action to meet their career and professional goals in each year of the program.

Visit medicine.usask.ca/students/undergraduate/mentoring.php to access a wealth of career planning and mentorship resources. Book an appointment with the Office of Career Advising and Mentorship staff to access 30-minute appointments for:

- career advising
- mock interviews
- electives planning
- CV and personal letter review

For more information or to book an appointment, call 306-966-7275 or email med.mentorship@usask.ca
## MD student career planning timeline

### Year 1: Know yourself

- Conducting an honest **self-assessment** is the foundation of the career-planning process.

### Year 2: Explore your options

- Whether you already have a vision of your career or are still deciding, systemically **researching your options** helps you secure the optimal outcome.

### Year 3: Choose your specialty

- Integrating what you've learned about yourself with what you've learned about various specialties will lead you to the **specialty option(s) that will be the most fulfilling and practical** to you.

### Year 4: Prepare for residency

- Identifying and pursuing a residency program demands the same type of rigorous, knowledge-based inquiry process as your medical studies.

### Year 1 activities:
- **Begin shadowing**
- Complete Careers in Medicine (CiM) registration
- Sign up for PEERSiM Mentoring Program
- Go to Career Dialogues speaker series
- Sign up for an SMA Roadmap experience
- Seek volunteer opportunities
- Go to a career advising appointment
- Apply for a dean's research project
- Get a physician mentor with Synergy
- Complete the MSPI, SIS and PVIP assessments on CiM
- Start a draft of your CV
- Explore leadership opportunities

### Year 2 activities:
- **Begin shadowing**
- Be a mentor with the PEERSiM Mentoring Program
- Attend Career Dialogues
- Sign up for an SMA Roadmap experience
- Sign up for an SMA Roadmap experience
- Go to a career advising appointment
- Keep volunteering
- Apply for another dean's research project
- Join the Synergy Mentorship Program again
- Engage in leadership opportunities
- Join the Synergy Mentorship Program again
- Engage in leadership opportunities

### Year 3 activities:
- **Begin researching programs**
- Investigate specialty competitiveness
- Gather info from experts at Career Day
- Narrow your specialty options to two or three
- Begin exploring electives when the AFMC portal opens
- Sign up for PREP via saskdocs
- Begin exploring electives when the AFMC portal opens
- Sign up for an SMA Roadmap experience
- Capture notes for your PL
- Go to a career advising appointment
- Keep referees top of mind
- Engage in leadership opportunities
- Be a mentor in PEERSiM
- Engage in leadership opportunities

### Year 4 activities:
- **Create personal letter drafts**
- Attend your residency application review appointment
- Request reference letters
- Review program descriptions
- Explore CaRMS portal when it opens
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- Explore CaRMS portal when it opens
- Explore CaRMS portal when it opens
- Submit residency applications
- Get a mock interview
- Book travel to interviews
- Submit rank order list
- Match Day
- Engage in leadership opportunities
- CaRMS Presents Your Match Day

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**Conducting an honest self-assessment is the foundation of the career-planning process.**

**Integrating what you’ve learned about yourself with what you’ve learned about various specialties will lead you to the specialty option(s) that will be the most fulfilling and practical** to you.

**Identifying and pursuing a residency program demands the same type of rigorous, knowledge-based inquiry process as your medical studies.**
What is the career advising system?

The College of Medicine has an effective and, where appropriate, confidential career advising system in place that integrates the efforts of faculty members, directors of required clinical learning experiences and student services staff. The career advising system assists medical students in choosing elective courses, evaluating career options and applying to residency programs. It provides appropriate, mandatory and confidential (optional) career advising activities to students in each year of the program. The OCA&M engages medical students in a variety of settings including: curricular sessions, events/seminars, one-on-one appointments, mentorship programs, and through web and print resources.

The OCA&M provides career advising to students in Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert, as well as to students who are away from the medical school campus.

Career advising vs. career counselling vs. career mentoring

It’s all helping students, right? So what’s the difference? While these terms overlap, they are different. Kuhn et al describe a continuum of levels of complexity and involvement associated with each role.

Advising is informational and exploratory in nature. An advising relationship is about setting goals, evaluating obstacles, and providing guidance in the context of students’ needs and values to help them reach those goals.

Mentoring is an ongoing, caring relationship defined by extensive support and encouragement. It’s an organic relationship that is developed rather than assigned, as is often the case with advising. Mentors are role models and often help acculturate their mentees into medicine and/or a specialty.

Counselling is the most complex and involved form of helping where students are assisted by a trained professional to overcome problems that interfere with their academic, career or personal success. A true counselling relationship is best left to trained counsellors and therapists, but anyone involved in helping students should know how to make effective referrals.


Careers in Medicine (CiM) is a career planning tool sponsored by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). The CiM online platform is built upon a structured four-year career planning model. It provides students with a foundation for taking inventory of their strengths, skills, interests and personality to better understand themselves, and assists them with exploring their options, choosing a specialty or residency program and making career/life decisions. Students are assigned a CiM access code after orientation in Year 1 and the tool can be accessed at aamc.org/careersinmedicine.

Shadowing
Every medical student is required to complete 10 hours (five hours/term) per year of medical practitioner shadowing for MEDC 111 and MEDC 211 Success in Medical School courses in Year 1 and Year 2. You may shadow physicians or nearly any professional discipline in the health-care field.

If you are unsure if a particular discipline should qualify as a medical shadowing experience, please check with the UGME office. Shadowing experiences are an excellent opportunity to explore a variety of disciplines while networking with physicians in the field of practice that you are interested in. Always be professional and be sure to graciously thank them for their time.

Career planning curriculum
Curricular OCA&M hours can be found within Success in Medical School I, II, and III, within Selected Topics in Year 3, and in Preparation for Residency at the culmination of Year 4. Forty per cent of the lectures will be delivered from Regina.

Lectures include interactive didactic sessions, informative panels with student and faculty participants, and facilitated workshops. Topics include elective planning strategies, CV and personal letter development, and practice opportunities within our province.
# Summer opportunities

## Research

Research stipends are provided from the Office of the Vice-Dean Research in the College of Medicine for students to participate on summer projects in all areas of health research (biomedical, clinical, social/population health projects). These funds are derived from both internal and external sources and represent the aggregate of funding available for this work. Students embark on a minimum of 10 weeks of research with a mentor in their area of research choice. Students are encouraged to engage with clinical faculty early in the fall term to determine if they are interested in supervising a research project. If students require assistance, please contact the research manager in the Office of the Vice Dean Research.

It has been typical that the complete timeline as well as information relating to the projects is presented to the students in late October or early November. The application process is completed via an online application form which the students gain access to by sending a notification of interest to the research manager. Further details are distributed at that time.

While every effort is made to secure additional funding for these research projects, the funding pool for them is still primarily through the interest earned on endowed funds held by the college and university. These allow for stipends for approximately 80 students to participate in the program, with some of the funding being targeted to specific research areas. Additional detail on these is provided in the fall when the exact funding envelope is known.

The research training gained through summer research projects may be beneficial when applying to some residency programs.

Timelines and additional information are available from the College of Medicine research website at: https://medicine.usask.ca/deans-summer-research.php#overviewofprogram

## PREP summer externships

The Physician Recruitment Agency of Saskatchewan’s Rural Externship Program (PREP) is a collaborative initiative delivered to U of S medical students between their second and third years of study. saskdocs, the U of S College of Medicine, the Saskatchewan Medical Association and Regional Health Authorities all play a part in delivering the program, which gives medical students a chance to shadow an established family physician practicing medicine in a rural or remote community.

The goal of the program is to give medical students a chance to experience rural medicine in order to help them plan and prepare for their medical career. The program is also a great opportunity for medical students to gain experience in history taking, physical exams, minor procedures and working in a hospital or clinical setting under supervised conditions.

Medical students can apply to participate in a 4 to 10 week externship. Typically the program provides students with a salary of $500/week (subject to applicable deductions) and living allowance. Following completion of PREP, participants receive preceptor feedback.

saskdocs, the SMA and other partners host an information session each year to provide program details and share experiences from past PREP participants. These information sessions are great opportunities for medical students to find out more information and also ask questions about available externship locations, preceptors, the health region and participating communities.

Additional information on PREP, including application forms, can be found on saskdocs’ website: https://medicine.usask.ca/deans-summer-research.php#overviewofprogram

# Career supports

## Career day

Career Day is a mandatory event for Year 3 students, from all sites, hosted on the main campus in Saskatoon. It allows students to collect crucial information relating to their interests, career advisors work with the Office of the Vice Dean Research to book an appointment in Saskatoon or Regina. They may also be conducted by phone or video conference. Career advisors stay abreast of the UGME Office policies and procedures in order to provide accurate elective advising. Several elective types exist that career advisors are able to advise on:

- rural electives
- urban electives
- international electives
- francophone settings
- global health electives

In an elective advising appointment, career advisors work with the student to outline a plan for Year 4 electives, discuss elective decision-making strategies, assist the student in beginning to refine specialty options, and discuss preliminary preparations for residency application.

## Career advising: electives planning

Career advising in the area of elective planning is available to any student at any site, but is particularly geared towards Year 3 MD students.

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## Career dialogues

The Student Medical Society of Saskatchewan (SMSS) in association with the OCA&M, has a seminar series titled Career Dialogues designed to present information to the students about specialty options. Each session features a department from a different discipline. The presenting department provides a description of their program, strategies for matching, competitiveness of the specialty, research opportunities, lifestyle, hours of work, and income. At the presentation, a question and answer period follows. Career Dialogues partner with the Saskatchewan Physician Recruitment Agency to provide employment outlook information on each of the featured specialties.

Past participants have included past participants have included, but are not limited to: anesthesia, cardiology, emergency medicine, family medicine, internal medicine, medical imaging, neurology, neurosurgery, obstetrics/gynecology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, pathology, pediatrics, psychiatry, plastic surgery, physical medicine/rehabilitation, respiratory medicine, rheumatology, surgery, urology and ENT.

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**Career assessments**

The CiM program provides various self-assessments and exercises to assist in students understanding themselves. Each one addresses a different aspect of their characteristics and attributes.

Considering all self-assessment results together, with the help of a career advisor, creates a total picture of who the student is and what specialty is best suited to them. It will help students think more clearly about their career options. Given this self-understanding, students will be establishing personal criteria for selecting their preferred specialty and residency programs.

**Interests**
The Medical Specialty Preference Inventory (MSPI-R), available through CiM, helps students identify their interests in medicine and recommends specialties that reflect those interests within 16 major medical specialties. This free assessment provides two sets of scores, including Specialty Choices Probabilities and Medical Interest Scales.

**Values**
The Physician Values in Practice Scale (PVIPS), available through CiM, helps students understand what’s important to them in their career and how they want to practice medicine.

**Strengths**
The Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment available online increases students’ self-awareness of their unique strengths.

**Skills**
The Physician Skills Inventory (PSI), available through CiM, helps students explore their strengths in selected areas important to the work of a physician.

**Personality**
The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®), available through the OCA&M, helps students consider their personality type. A student’s personality impacts such things as how they relate to others and how they make decisions as it relates to the medical practice. Students can store their four-letter personality type on the career assessment dashboard within CiM.

**Decision-making**
The Specialty Indecision Scale (SIS), available through CiM, helps students consider various specialty choices. It can help them overcome barriers that may prevent them from making a specialty decision.

The OCA&M mentoring programs are a part of the career advising system, dedicated to enhancing and supporting an academic community of mentorship.

It consists of three mentoring levels that exist to serve undergraduate MD students, integrate community-based faculty, and provide role models to elementary grade students in Saskatoon. They are:
- student-to-student (PEERSiM),
- physician-to-student (Synergy), and;
- student-to-community (Big Brothers and Big Sisters).

The Indigenous Mentoring Program, a collaboration between the College of Medicine’s Aboriginal Student Services and Office of Career Advising and Mentoring, works with all three levels.

Contributions to each program are acknowledged at our annual Excellence in Mentoring Awards Ceremony and Dinner.
Physician-to-student

Student-Physician Mentorship Program (Synergy)

The goal of the Synergy program is to match one current medical student at the College of Medicine with one practicing physician, who is to mentor the student until completion of their medical school. The program allows mentors and mentees to share experiences with their counterparts and learn from the experiences of other mentorships.

An external, supportive construct can help keep the relationship on track through any challenges that may arise. In the previous, second year of the program, all Regina-based mentees who applied to the program had been matched with Regina-based physician mentors.

Student-to-community

Big Brothers and Big Sisters In-School Program (BBBS)

USask MD students have the opportunity to make a difference in the life of a Saskatoon child and to contribute to the community outside of the university. The program involves mentoring in a student's elementary school and being a positive role model in their life. Mentors are asked to commit to a visit once a week, but it can be flexible if something prevents a mentor from attending on a regular day. A mentor’s chosen time during the week can also vary based on their availability and what is arranged with the student’s teacher.

A mentor can be placed at a variety of schools across the city, based on their preferences. Many mentors from the College of Medicine are located at St. Michael’s on 33rd Street, which has amazing staff and numerous activities for mentors and mentees.

Possible activities include going outside to play sports, board games, gym activities, cooking, crafts, computers, joining them on field trips, reading, etc.

Student-to-student

Program to Engage and Exchange Resources for Students in Medicine (PEERSiM)

The mission of the P.E.E.R.S.i.M. Mentorship Program is to guide first-year students through a successful transition to the College of Medicine, to connect all students to the college’s supportive helping resources, and to help create community amongst the diverse, creative group of future physicians.

Peer mentors (upper-year medical students) serve as role models of successful students who promote the College of Medicine’s mission through their ongoing, positive leadership both inside and outside the classroom. For first-year students moving to Regina for the remainder of their studies, mentors are sought from senior Regina-based students.

Goals of the Program

• To ensure the academic success of students during their transition to the College of Medicine and to support their continued academic achievement through graduation.
• To offer opportunities for learning, leadership and service outside of the formal academic curriculum.
• To build community by creating a more inclusive campus environment and by addressing the cultural needs of new students.

Residency application supports

CaRMS

The Canadian Resident Matching Service (CaRMS) is a national, independent, not-for-profit, fee-for-service organization that provides a fair, objective and transparent application and matching service for medical training throughout Canada.

Residency application preparation

• Meet with a career advisor to review drafts of your CV, personal letter and to discuss a competitive match strategy
• Mandatory 45-minute appointments scheduled in Year 4
• Available in-person, via video conference, or via phone

Data and statistics

The R-1 Main Residency Match Report is made available to the public by CaRMS for informational purposes related to the first and second iterations of the match. The R-1 match report provides information to faculties of medicine and applicants on match trends and results, as well as results from previous years’ matches.
Book an appointment

30 minute one-on-one appointments

- Career advising
- Mock interviews
- CV review
- Personal letter review
- Electives planning

Web and print resources

- OCA&M website
- Careers in Medicine
- usask MD student CV guide
- usask MD student personal letter guide
- usask MD student interview guide

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