

Shadowing and Observation Hours

Most professional schools require that applicants complete shadowing or observation hours. Shadowing is an opportunity for you to find out if a career in the field you are interested in is a good fit for you. It also demonstrates a commitment to your chosen career.

Benefits of shadowing:

- Develop your understanding of what a health provider's typical day is like.
- Determine your fit in the profession by observing the skills and attributes needed to succeed.
- Explore different specialties and medical environments.
- Provides experiences to discuss in your application and interview.

Preparing to Shadow:

Shadowing requires pre-planning. When requesting a shadow, give providers ample time to respond to your request!

Identify a provider to shadow:

- Start by asking a health professional that you know.
- Ask family, teachers, professors, advisors, or Career Services for recommendations of health providers whom other students have shadowed in the past.
- Talk with students in your pre-health organization about where they have shadowed in the past.
- Contact hospitals or clinics directly to inquire whether they allow shadowing.

Request to shadow:

- Reach out early - about one month in advance.
- Prepare a script to use when inquiring about shadowing.
 - Share where you go to school, your health-related experiences, and your career goals.
 - Express why you want to shadow.
 - Do you want to learn about a certain specialty area? Are you trying to determine which health field is right for you?
 - Ask if they are willing to host you to shadow in a clinical environment and when is convenient for them.
 - Identify the timeframe in which you want to shadow (for example: between May 1 - August 1).
 - Attach your resume to your email.
- Remember - this is a professional communication! Proofread your email before contacting the provider.

Before you shadow:

- Ask about requirements that should be completed prior to shadowing, such as a background check, confidentiality statements, proof of immunizations, and vaccinations.
- Ask the practitioner about what to expect, any ground rules, duration of the day, any special attire, etc. If you have visible tattoos or piercings, ask about the clinic's policy regarding this.
- Prepare questions about areas you want to learn more about.

Shadowing:

You should arrive prepared for your shadowing experience. This is an opportunity to develop a professional connection, so you want to make a positive first impression!

What to wear:

- Dress professionally and comfortably.
- Wear business casual clothing (dress pants, nice shirt).
- Wear close-toed shoes.

How to engage:

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early and be respectful of everyone you meet.
- Introduce yourself - lead with a handshake and make eye contact.
- Bring a notebook to take notes about what you observe during the experience.
- Ask questions when appropriate (not in front of patients).
- Turn off your phone—or better yet, do not have it with you. No pictures—ever.

After Shadowing:

After completing your shadowing experience, there are still steps to take!

- Write a thank you note to the provider you shadowed, thanking them for their time.
- Reflect on your experience so you can refer to your notes later:
 - Note the different patient populations and how the provider interacted differently.
 - Is this field what you expected it to be? How so?
 - What did you learn about being a professional in this field?
 - What did you enjoy most about the experience? What did you enjoy least?
 - How does this experience contribute to your understanding of this health field?
- Track your observation hours! Some programs will request that you list this information on your application.

Sample Questions to Ask While Shadowing:

- On a typical day, what do you do? How do you organize your day?
- What percentage of your time is spent doing various activities?
- How do you balance work and family responsibilities?
- What personal attributes or characteristics are important to being successful in this field?
- If you could do it all over again, would you enter the same field?
- How do you see this field changing in the future?
- What do you look for in a colleague?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- Will the demand for this field be changing in the future? Why or why not?
- What advice would you give someone hoping to enter this field?
- What courses do you wish you would have taken as an undergraduate student?
- How did your undergraduate years prepare you for this field?
- Why did you ask the patient/client that question?