

## **Career Counseling in Family Medicine**

### **Frequently-Asked Questions**

This booklet has been prepared by the Department of Family Medicine in response to questions frequently asked by medical students who wish to explore the training and career opportunities in our specialty. We hope that it will be helpful to students and serve as a basis of discussion in individual meetings with faculty members and residents.

#### **Can you give me a brief description of the field? What are the key elements of this field that define it?**

The AAFP (American Academy of Family Physicians) describes Family Medicine as “the medical specialty which provides continuing, comprehensive health care for the individual and family. It is a specialty in breadth that integrates the biological, clinical and behavioral sciences. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, sexes, each organ system and every disease entity.”

Family Medicine is a three-dimensional specialty, incorporating (1) knowledge, (2) skill and (3) process. At the center of the process element is the patient-physician relationship with the patient viewed in the context of the family. It is the extent to which this relationship is valued, developed, nurtured and maintained that distinguishes family medicine from all other specialties.

#### **What is the patient population that I will encounter?**

Family physicians encounter and care for patients of all age groups and genders with all conditions, acute and chronic. The demographics of the patient population will vary depending on the location of practice.

#### **Is it possible to describe the personality characteristics of a physician in the field?**

It is important for the Family Physician to enjoy interacting with people. The following personality traits are especially suited to a family physician: patience, caring, understanding, compassion. Part of the Family Physician role is to act as a strong advocate for the patients, as he or she integrates and coordinates their patient care. Therefore it is important for the Family Physician to have excellent communication skills.

### **How long is the training program/residency?**

Residency Training in Family Medicine is of three years duration.  
In addition, there are a small number of Family Medicine combined training programs which are of five years duration:

Family Medicine/Psychiatry  
Family Medicine/Emergency Medicine  
Family Medicine/ Preventive Medicine  
Family Medicine/ Enhanced Obstetrics

### **Are there fellowships available after residency?**

Yes. After completion of residency, the following are available fellowships:

1. Women's Health
2. Geriatrics
3. Sports Medicine
4. Faculty Development
5. Emergency Medicine
6. Hospice and Palliative Care
7. Preventive Medicine
8. Adolescent Medicine
9. International Medicine
10. Obstetrics
11. Rural Medicine
12. Research
13. Substance Abuse

A fellowship directory is available at <http://www.aafp.org/fellowships>

### **How do I know if my academic record/grades will make me a suitable applicant?**

To be a competitive applicant for Family Medicine training you must be a student in good standing and have passed your primary care or Family Medicine rotations at the first attempt.

### **What is the role of my USMLE Step 1 Score? What is a competitive score to qualify for an interview?**

A passing Step 1 score on the USMLE is adequate to make a student eligible to be considered for residency training in Family Medicine. However, a score of 200 or higher is preferred.

**Do I need a Step 2 CK score to be screened for an interview? To be ranked?**

A Step 2 CK score is not required to obtain an interview for Family Medicine residency training. A passing score on the Step 2 CK exam may make you more competitive as a candidate.

**If I fail step 1 what are my options. Should I take step 2 two early?**

It is recommended that you give yourself adequate time to prepare for Step 2 to ensure favorable results which will serve to enhance your application to our specialty.

**Is there anything that I can do in my rotation or elective experience in this field to enhance my qualifications?**

To enhance your qualifications as a candidate in Family Medicine, plan for a Family Medicine rotation during your Primary Care 1 Clerkship in order to familiarize yourself with our specialty. You may also do a preceptorship elective in Family Medicine. Working diligently and performing well during the rotation can enhance your qualifications, especially if you planning to enroll in a highly competitive residency program.

**Should I take outside electives in other institutions? If so, how many are advised and allowed.**

It is not necessary and not required to take outside electives in other institutions.

**Is research experience important in my application to this field? Do I need to do a one year research experience: Will research offset a low step 1 score?**

Research experience is not necessary to apply successfully in Family Medicine. Research may serve to enhance your application but will not offset a low Step 1 score.

**Is community service important in my application to this field?**

Community service is not a requirement to apply in Family Medicine, but it will serve to enhance your application.

**What do you advise on obtaining letters of recommendation; do I need a chair's letter.**

It is in the Medical Student's best interest to request faculty letters of recommendation early to give faculty enough time to prepare them. A Chair's letter is also important for your application. Please contact Dr. Miriam T. Vincent, Professor and Chair of Family Medicine at SUNY, Downstate at 718-270-2443 or mvincent@downstate.edu.

**If I want to learn more about the field, can you recommend how I do that?**

To learn more about Family Medicine, you can arrange to meet with one of our faculty advisors listed by our Office of the Dean. The Department of Family Medicine is located in the Basic Science Building BSB 1-115; Our departmental telephone number is 718-270-4096. You may also contact one of our current Residents and ask them to share their experiences and advice, by leaving a message for them at our department office. Another great source of information about Family Medicine can be found at the AAFP website (<http://www.aafp.org>) which has a wealth of information for students.

Thank you for your interest!