

Choosing a medical school is a very important decision. The next four years will be the foundation for your future career and believe it or not, they will pass by very quickly and before you know it, you will be ranking residency programs. I chose Downstate for several key reasons. First, I wanted a school with solid clinical exposure, a lot of pathology and diverse patient population. I wanted to be able to see diseases I read about in the books, I wanted to provide patient care as a student, learn how to place IVs, draw blood, learn how to advocate for my patients and explain difficult concepts to them, I wanted to be an integral part of the team. I knew that Downstate has many clinical sites in NYC, importantly Kings County Hospital and University Hospital, that will give me this opportunity. Second, I looked at Downstate's residency match lists for the previous few years and they were impressive, clearly the school was well-regarded among top residency programs in the country. And finally, I wanted to stay close to my family. Living in Park Slope, it was hard to imagine a more convenient and fun place to be, close to the park, Manhattan and walking distance to major show/ sports arena, restaurants, and etc. I wanted to still be able to have fun while I'm in school and be able to keep in touch with old friends.

As I was starting medical school I was questioning myself: "Can I learn all this information? Is there any way I can ever be able to get all the necessary details about patient's history and make any sense of it? Will I ever know what to do with this information?" I was on a roller-coaster of self-doubt. Soon I realized that most of my classmates were going through exactly the same thing - it is hard to learn and apply the enormous amount of material presented, but the truth is - we all go through it and survive. At Downstate I found that students were very supportive of each other, not only within the class but also across classes. For example, right now we are building a database of 2017 graduates who are willing to be point of contact for future students for their specialty and residency program. After just one email asking for volunteers I got over 50 responses within a day. In addition, Downstate has fantastic faculty who enjoy teaching and care deeply about students' learning. I would say that overall testing is done in a USMLE format, but teaching and expectations are significantly higher than that. The basic science curriculum is very closely linked with clinical applications with frequent and gradual opportunities for patient exposure in the first 2 years. In terms of clinical years, in the third year there are opportunities to rotate at public hospitals with underserved populations such as Kings County, at Downstate Medical Center, at large private hospital systems such as Northwell and at Brooklyn VA - this gave me better idea about different clinical settings and where I want to practice medicine. I was actually surprised by how much responsibility I often had as a student and that I could make a big difference in patient care and that was extremely rewarding. Finally, in the 4th year, we had A LOT of elective time and that was awesome both for figuring out career choices, doing away electives and for taking a well-deserved break, so I am finishing the year between Puerto Rico and Nepal trips. Some people do Global health electives, which I heard are amazing too. Throughout all the years, I felt that I was supported by Downstate faculty and deans every step of the way (including STEPs - no pun intended) and being here truly feels like a family.

Sincerely,
Elizaveta