

**REFERENCES**

Medical schools use references to help confirm or support other elements of your application. References provide written comments on your suitability and aptitude for medicine. They might also score you on qualities that medical schools seek.

**ASK YOURSELF**

What do others say about me? Do they think I am of good character and suitable for this career?

**SPECIAL-CATEGORY DOCUMENTS**

Medical schools identify special categories for admission that target underrepresented groups in medicine. To apply under a special category, medical schools require documents to confirm that you identify as a member of a special category. In some cases, these documents may help reviewers understand more about your background.

**ASK YOURSELF**

Do any special categories for admission apply to me? Do I wish to be considered under a special category?

**INTERVIEWS**

Interviews are time-consuming and labour intensive for medical schools to orchestrate. Why do they pour so much money and energy into them? Perhaps it's because interviews offer a way to assess candidates in real time.

**ASK YOURSELF**

As a candidate, can I establish connection and competency with a variety of people and situations? Can I communicate logically and with compassion?

***What programs and degrees do medical schools accept?***

Medical schools in Canada currently do not define what degree or degrees you should do before entering medicine. The majority of candidates come from undergraduate or graduate programs in the sciences or health sciences, probably because these academic areas overlap with aspects of medicine and attract people with similar interests. I have worked with lots of these people. I have also worked with lots of

**INSIDER INSIGHT**

You can major in any degree program and apply to medical school.

undergraduate and graduate students from many other disciplines: engineering, philosophy, geography, psychology, fine arts, and more.

Certainly, the focus of your undergraduate degree is something to ponder, if you are in high school and contemplating university programs. In early university, it is still something to ponder: many students change their major a few times before settling on what works best for them.

There are lots of myths and rumours floating around about what I call “the hierarchy of degrees.” Students sometimes get worked up about which degrees are viewed by medical schools as “best,” as “harder,” as “more elite.”

In my view, your major is not that important. Medical schools accept students from any degree program. When I screened applicants for medical-school admissions, I often had no idea what degree program a candidate was doing—even at the interview stage. I interpret this as another sign (along with special-category admissions) that medical schools really are serious about wanting a diversity of backgrounds.

Do you love science? Do you love medieval history? Choose the program that you wish to pursue and that you feel will help best prepare you for a possible application to medical school (and other options). Which programs allow you to gather prerequisites for medicine that you might need?

Where do your academic skills lie? As much as the career practitioner in me wants to encourage students to “try things” and “expand your horizons” in university, if you are thinking about medical school, you need to make choices that maintain your grades. Even the odd elective course with an outlier grade can sometimes negatively affect your cumulative GPA.

What else might you want to do besides medicine? Consider programs that help leave doors open to other possible careers. I worked with a student in film studies who wanted to spend his undergraduate time learning in a creative environment, with film production and directing as career options, but always with a view to becoming a doctor.

**INSIDER INSIGHT**

Given the heavy emphasis on cumulative, undergraduate grades for medical-school applications, you might want to choose a program strategically, to maximize your best academic performance.