

Osteopathic Medical Education by Gary L. Willyerd

This Chapter is a compilation of extracts from multiple Web site resources. In the following sections you will find Web site links for the complete text and additional pertinent information offered at that site. The [Association of Osteopathic Directors and Medical Educators \(AODME\)](#) Web site offers additional resources and is expected to have its “Director of Medical Education Resource Manual” available in early 2004.

Osteopathic medicine is the fastest growing healthcare profession in the United States. Between 1989 and 1994, osteopathic physicians’ (DO) growth outpaced allopathic physician (MD) growth by almost a factor of two. By the year 2020, over 80,000 osteopathic physicians will be in practice in the US.

DOs are complete physicians, which means they are fully trained and licensed to prescribe medication and to perform surgery. DOs and MDs are the only fully licensed physicians in the United States.

With a strong commitment to primary care and prevention, osteopathic physicians (DOs) are becoming the physicians of choice for more and more people. Osteopathic medicine emphasizes the inter-relationship of the body’s nerves, muscles, bones, and organs. The osteopathic philosophy of treating the whole person is applied to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, disease, and injury.

Because osteopathic medical education places a strong emphasis on primary medical care, more than 64 percent of all DOs practice in the primary-care areas of family practice, internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, and pediatrics. While the majority of DOs provide primary care, they can also specialize in any area of medicine from psychiatry to cardiology to ophthalmology.

PREDOCTORAL EDUCATION

To become an osteopathic physician, an individual must be a graduate of one of the nation’s osteopathic medical schools. Each school is accredited by the Bureau of Professional Education of the [American Osteopathic Association \(AOA\)](#). This accreditation is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Post-Secondary Education. Currently, there are twenty (20) accredited osteopathic medical colleges in the United States (see the [American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine link](#)).

Typically, applicants to osteopathic medical colleges have a four-year undergraduate degree and complete specific science courses. Applicants must take the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). Osteopathic medical schools also require a personal interview to assess the student’s interpersonal and communication skills.

The osteopathic curriculum involves four years of academic study. As a reflection of the osteopathic philosophy, the curriculum emphasizes preventive medicine and comprehensive patient care. The first two years of the osteopathic medical curriculum focus on basic sciences. The third and fourth years emphasize clinical work, with much of the teaching in community hospitals, major medical centers, and doctors’ offices. The core clerkships are primarily in the third year and most colleges of osteopathic medicine offer a number of elective rotations during the fourth year. During the clinical years, students

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