

## Undergraduate Medical Education by G. Patrick Ecklar and Terry Bahn

### APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOLS

While the traditional “premed” majors of biology and chemistry still predominate, prospective medical students today come with a wide range of baccalaureate degrees. Most enter upon completion of a traditional four-year program, but medical schools across the country also matriculate those for whom medicine is a second career. The common denominator is a very strong academic performance overall and in the requisite laboratory sciences: biology, chemistry, and physics.

Another important ingredient in the admissions process is competitive scores on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). In addition to testing in the biological and physical sciences, the MCAT includes a verbal reasoning section plus a writing sample. In the United States, students hoping to become physicians compete for admission to one of 125 allopathic and 20 osteopathic institutions. Brief descriptions that contrast the two types are included under the heading “Allopathic/Osteopathic Programs.” Students applying to the majority of allopathic schools do so via the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), a non-profit, centralized application processing service. Similarly, osteopathic applications are processed through the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Services (AACOMAS).

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### ALLOPATHIC/OSTEOPATHIC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The term “medical school” usually relates to allopathic institutions granting the MD, or Doctor of Medicine degree. Present day allopathic programs have their basis in Abraham Flexner’s 1910 report entitled “Medical Education in the United States and Canada,” in which Flexner proposed medical programs in the German tradition of strong biomedical sciences together with hands-on clinical training. Osteopathic Medicine had its origins in the late 1800s with its founder Andrew Taylor Still, an MD who became disenchanted with the practice of medicine. Dr. Still developed a system of medical care to promote the body’s natural ability to heal itself. That system was called “osteopathy.”

Both types of physician training programs include two years of basic biomedical sciences followed by two years of clinical training. In addition to the traditional 2 plus 2 format, recent innovations have included programs organized around organ systems and problem-based programs. Problem-based curricula de-emphasize teacher centered, lecture methods in favor of small group and student centered methods with teachers in the roles of facilitators.

Not unlike the typical internship or rotating year of residency, the third-year in both allopathic and osteopathic programs provides the broad exposure in the core specialty areas of internal medicine,

**G. Patrick Ecklar, MD** is program director, Internal Medicine Residency, Mount Carmel Health System, Columbus, OH, 43222; (614) 234-5279; pecklar@mchs.com.

**Terry Bahn, EdD** is clinical program director, The Ohio State University College of Medicine, Columbus, OH, 43210; (614) 292-2508; bahn.3@osu.edu.