Helping your students write about their experiences

The importance of reflection

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The value of experience

- Find out what you like and dislike
- Find out what a career is all about
- Clarify and validate your initial impressions
- Improve the articulation of your goals
- Understand other cultures
- Enhance your motivation
- Learn about “the dark side”
- Test your level of commitment
Who are you?
How have your experiences shaped who you are?

- Are you someone who learns from experience?
- Do you have broad interests?
- Have you interacted with people unlike you? (cultural awareness/competence)
- Can you function well on a team?
- Do you seem mature?
- Can we imagine ourselves trusting you with our health?

Becoming more self-aware

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Becoming mindful</th>
<th>Why is reflection important?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Continuous quality improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>Building relationships</td>
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<td>Express</td>
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What did you learn?

- What did you think about what you did or what you saw?
- Extract meaning from each experience immediately (journal)
- What insights did you gain?
- How did the experience clarify your choice to be a doctor (or not)?
- Reflect rather than describe

Difference between description and reflection

a cinematic example

SPOILER ALERT

Unbroken

Have at least one “take home” message
**“Must have” Experiences**

Choose labels carefully

- Clinical exposure = doctor-patient interactions
- Service = making a difference
- Leadership = guiding others, being responsible, initiating change, working toward a common goal
- Research = asking the right question, analyzing results, changing plan based on new information

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**Shadowing**

Exposure to what doctors do and think

Not a “hoop” to jump through. If applicant is not interested in shadowing then s/he is probably not interested in clinical medicine.
I was able to ask questions, take notes, and learn more about the field of family medicine. This was one of my most beneficial experiences because it provided me with direct patient contact and a vision of what a career in family medicine entails. This opportunity has reinforced my interest in primary care and medicine as a whole.

I often marvel at the breadth of knowledge that Dr. O. possesses and her ability to tap into it as she visits patients with a variety of ailments on any given day. The assortment of medical problems assessed stands in stark contrast to a specialty clinic, where the majority of issues are constrained to a particular area of the body and the physician’s knowledge is less broad but more in-depth.

What struck me most was the sheer number of unique illnesses and diagnoses a doctor encounters on a day-to-day basis. Although there are certain cases, such as sore throats and sinus infections, that are seen and treated frequently, medicine is diverse. The patients themselves are culturally and economically diverse. The illnesses, how they express themselves uniquely in each individual, and the correct treatments are diverse. The actions and reactions of patients are diverse.
Pure description

I helped to collect patient folders or to take files to labs. I shadowed in ob/gyn, pediatrics, internal medicine, and anesthesiology often attending morning rounds or observing surgeries. The experience gave me the opportunity to see the roles and importance of different departments.

Voyeur

I spent five hours a week with a pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon. Watching open heart surgery has been my most impressive medical experience. It was so inspiring to watch the surgery team take complete control of the patient's heart during the operation. It is amazing how doctors have found a way to stop a patient's heart from beating, and reroute the blood to a machine that oxygenates it. It underscored for me the power and responsibility physicians have over their patients.
Leaves us Hanging

I gained valuable insights into the "behind the scenes" work in health care, including what doctors did or did not do that would complicate the work of support staff. I determined to be a doctor who listens to and respects everyone involved in his practice.

Good observations

As I shadowed a wide variety of physicians in rural medicine, I saw that I thrive on the fast paced, demanding, and intellectually challenging daily routine of a doctor. I saw the importance of non-verbal communication during interactions with patients and how body language plays a role in patient care just as much as spoken words. It was captivating to see how every patient brings with them their own story, a unique personality, and a diverse background that determines how advice is heard.
Common Questions

· What are good clinical activities in which to engage?
  · Shadowing, volunteering in medical settings
  · Working as EMT, CNA, Scribe, MA

· What are the expected hours/duration of clinical activities?
  · Whatever it takes for you to understand what you are getting into. We recommend 40 hours minimum - ideally some being recent

· Do out of country shadowing experiences “count” toward shadowing hours?
  · We expect an understanding of medical practice in the U.S.

Common Questions

· Would there be any value in shadowing Doctors of Osteopathy or Naturopathy?
  · Any experience is valuable to you if it helps you have a better understanding of options and different types of healthcare careers.

· What is the importance of shadowing physicians from multiple disciplines in different settings?
  · You should shadow in any area in which you have an interest.
Service

The importance of performing volunteer work

- What do you consider as service?
- Volunteer work demonstrates your interest in helping others.
- Medicine is a service profession
- Longevity is a sign of commitment

Hospice volunteers are required to complete training for end-of-life issues, participate in continuing education, attend monthly meetings, and donate four hours of their time each month. Volunteers can provide companionship for patients or respite for the caregiver and work on office projects.

While I was initially uncomfortable in dealing with terminally-ill persons, in time I became at ease with these interactions. I was amazed at the perspective of some of these persons and their acceptance of their terminal condition.

I think that my experience will help me in the future to develop better relationships with my patients. Simple things such as body language, tone of voice, eye contact, and manners especially as they relate to listening and providing comfort to patients are things that can only be learned through experience.
Good observations

At the Free Clinic I learned clinical skills within a philosophy of patient empowerment. Working on a healthcare team taught me to be an effective mediator and to communicate my views, problem-solve, compromise, and at times stand by my values. Coordinating volunteers and working as an instructor and trainer taught me leadership, delegation, and support that is guiding but not oppressive.

The Beauty and Cancer Program is a very rewarding volunteer experience. While conducting wig and hat fitting appointments with patients undergoing cancer treatment, I have learned about how people react physically and emotionally to treatment. Cancer treatment has added stress because besides being ill, hair loss can affect a person's sense of self. Over the past two years, I have consoled people when they cried, dealt with overpowering families, helped guide the indecisive, calmed the impatient and comforted people struggling with physical sickness. I learned about myself through these experiences, finding that I am an effective communicator and understanding listener, able to adapt to diverse personalities, group dynamics, mental anguish and physical sickness. Accordingly, I contour each appointment to an individual's unique needs.
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<th>Leadership</th>
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<td>Physicians are often the leader of the healthcare team</td>
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<th>Titles</th>
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<td>Executive position in an organization</td>
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<td>Captain of an athletics team</td>
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<td>Head of a fund drive</td>
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<th>Qualities</th>
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<td>Guiding others</td>
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<td>Being responsible</td>
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<td>Initiating change</td>
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<td>Working toward a common goal</td>
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<td>In the fall of 2012, I served as a transfer orientation leader for incoming transfer students. In this position, I was an advisor and program leader during orientation week as well as throughout the semester. During this past spring, I was asked by a dean of admissions, who oversees transfer orientation, to be one of two commissioners for the spring 2013 orientation. This involved planning and running the entire transfer orientation program.</td>
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Good observations

While I once believed a leader’s job was to do the most work, I now recognize the role is less tangible and more complex. It is to inspire, assemble, and encourage your team; it is ensuring that end-goals remain in sight. It requires both nurturing and disciplining; it necessitates listening to the views of many, but also making unpopular final calls. And it means knowing when to follow.

Research

• Future in research
• Combined degree
• Future in academic medicine
• Proxy for curiosity
• Proxy for self-directed learning
• Proxy for problem solving ability
• Peek into resilience
The goal of our current research is to understand how inhibitors of Class 1 histone deacetylases (HDAC) are neuroprotective and, ultimately, to identify the specific HDAC target.

From this experience I can see that research is not my main passion in life and my interests lie in the clinical practice of medicine. However, I gained insight in working with children and found that it is rewarding and fulfilling. Through my research, I saw how video games could be used to create therapies to help children with cerebral palsy. This concept extends outside of rehabilitative medicine as well. No one likes to be sick or the treatment it takes to get better. Making treatments more tolerable should always be a top priority because it goes hand in hand with patient compliance, leading to better outcomes.
<table>
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<th>Words that leave us hanging</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Broadened my exposure...</td>
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<td>• Helped me understand...</td>
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<td>• Made me realize...</td>
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<tr>
<td>• This experience has shown me</td>
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<tr>
<td>the rewards...</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There are no words to describe...</td>
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<td>• Broad interests and life experiences help you relate to other people</td>
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<td>• Never choose an experience “to get in”</td>
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<td>• Choose experiences that are consistent with your present goals</td>
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<td>• Record what insights you gained from each experience</td>
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<td>• Reflect rather than describe</td>
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Group Activity

- Divide into groups
- Look at sample experiences
  1. Select your own individual impression
  2. Record the average score from your group discussion
  3. Record wrap-up score