

## Kirkland House Premedical Advising Guide

Gaining clinical experience – that is, putting yourself in situations where you can interact with doctors and patients and see what the daily life of a physician is like – is perhaps the least straightforward but *most important* part of the medical school application process.

Shadowing is a logistically complicated activity and difficult to squeeze in at the last minute. We recommend chipping away at this over the long term, and meeting a handful of doctors in the specialties that most interest you.

There is no “magic number” of hours that you must have shadowed, or worked in a clinic. The goal is that by the time you are in a medical school interview and you are asked, “Tell me about a patient you met or a doctor’s style you liked,” you will have many experiences to draw from. Of course, the broader goal is to find out if you will *enjoy* the daily practice of doctoring!

*Whenever you ask a physician to shadow:*

Indicate that you are a Harvard undergraduate and give your year in school, concentration, phone number, and how your interests align with those of the physician you want to meet.

Note that most doctors are only able to have a shadower for one morning/afternoon/day, or a handful of sessions. However long the physician can accommodate you, be grateful, **send a thank-you note or email**, and always ask if they know any other who doctors you might be able to shadow.

### **Here are some of the ways we recommend finding shadowing opportunities:**

- *Shadow physicians in your home community.*  
This could be your family doctor or doctors that you and your family know socially. We also recommend searching the Harvard [alumni directory](#) for physicians who work in your local area. Cold-emailing physicians (Harvard alums or not) and asking to shadow them outside of the Boston area as a Harvard student often holds more sway the further you get from 02138.
- *Shadow physicians in Boston.*  
This is often more challenging, as there’s a lot of red tape to get through in order to shadow at large academic medical centers such as those in Boston. Try searching in private practices in nearby towns such as Brookline, Newton, Weston, Wellesley, Belmont, and Cambridge. Again we encourage looking for Harvard-graduated physicians in the [alumni directory](#), or simply cold-emailing local practitioners
- *Explore health-related [PBHA public service organizations](#), as many of their programs give undergraduates an opportunity to work in health settings.*
- *Apply for the Harvard Premed Society Physician Mentoring Program.*  
The [Harvard Premedical Society](#) runs a program called the Physician Mentoring Program. The application is in the fall and it is open to students in all four years. About 100 students a year get matched with a mentor and this involves shadowing in most disciplines (though less in specialties like psychiatry, in which case students can meet their mentors but don’t see patients). This program has the added bonus of getting you in the pipeline to get hospital-shadowing requirements such as getting your immunization records in order, TB screening test, and flu shot. The program also a training session on how to be professional in the shadowing setting.

\*Their Fall 2017 application has already closed, but email the organization staff to inquire about the next application cycle.

- *Connect with the Harvard Alumni Association Shared Interest Group (SIG) “Harvard Alumni in Healthcare” to connect with more Harvard physicians who are interested in mentoring students.* They recently launched a very user-friendly [website](#), and encourage Harvard students interested in medicine and healthcare to register for the website. It can be found at: [harvardlaumnihealthcare.com](http://harvardlaumnihealthcare.com). Select the “join” tab and request an invite to enroll by entering your name and your @college.harvard.edu (or post for alums) address.
- *Harvard pre-med student athletes, please reach out to the [Athlete Medical Mentorship program](#).*
- *Reach out to your professors and research mentors (such as laboratory PIs) who are doctors or who work with doctors, and ask for an introduction.*  
Many researchers who work in the life sciences or health policy/social sciences realm but did not go to medical school collaborate with physicians in their research.
- *Explore hospital volunteering programs.*  
These programs can be competitive to get into, and often require a lot of upfront paperwork and training. But, they offer a straightforward opportunity to spend time in a hospital setting. While most hospital volunteering programs don’t offer direct shadowing opportunities, hospital physicians will be more likely to accommodate you if you reach out to them and let them know you are *already* a hospital volunteer at that institution (and thus already have a name badge, appropriate vacations, HIPAA training, etc.)