

FAQ about Shadowing a Healthcare Professional

The following are frequently asked questions of students planning to shadow a healthcare professional.

Q. What is the purpose of shadowing a healthcare professional?

A. A shadowing experience provides an introduction to professions in healthcare and the day-to-day responsibilities of the health care providers. It also offers the physician and/or other health care provider the opportunity to model professionalism as well as ethical and culturally sensitive treatment of patients. Critical to the experience is the awareness and education of both the student and the patient regarding the importance of the patient's rights, privacy and confidentiality.

Q. What should I not to when shadowing a healthcare professional?

A. Since the primary purpose of shadowing is observation, the experience should focus on watching the healthcare professional as s/he performs his or her duties. The student should never engage in any activity that is considered the practice of medicine. These activities include, but are not limited to: diagnosing diseases, administering medications, performing surgical procedures, suturing, providing medical advice or other tasks generally reserved for the trained health professional.

Q. How can I find healthcare professionals to shadow?

A. Many students start in their personal network, checking with their family doctor to see if their practice allows shadowing. Checking with family and friends to see if their doctor's office allows shadowing. You can also reach out to offices in the Chattanooga area, many allow shadowing.

Q. Does it matter which healthcare professional I shadow?

A. Generally, no shadowing any type of healthcare professional will look good on an application, however, if your program states a preferred healthcare professional, or requires shadowing from a particular type of healthcare professional, you will want to obtain your shadowing hours from that type of healthcare professional.

Q. I have a family member or friend who is a healthcare professional, can I shadow them?

A. Most programs prefer students shadow healthcare professionals who are not family or close to the student. This allows a more objective evaluation of the student by the professional. Healthcare programs also expect applicants to step outside of their comfort some while shadowing, so it is best to shadow someone not related to you.

Q. When should I start looking for places to shadow?

A. It is best to start as early as possible. Many places that allow shadowing will have waitlists or an extensive training or application process and it may take time before you can start shadowing. Some programs have large shadowing hour requirements for admission, and it will take time to log those hours while going to school full time.

Q. Do I have to shadow at the same place for all my hours?

A. Generally, no you can shadow multiple professionals in multiple locations unless otherwise stated by the program you applying to. You do want to make sure you spend a good amount of time with each professional you shadow, as some programs require an evaluation from the professional about you. Shadowing fewer people for larger amounts of time will give them an opportunity to speak more in-depth about you.

Q. How should I track my shadowing hours?

A. You will be asked about your shadowing experience in applications such as the CASPA (PA) and will need to supply in depth information. Keep a journal about your experiences, log things such as: dates, locations, hours, who you shadowed, that persons contact information (phone, email), and a bit of what you observed. Having this will allow you to discuss your shadowing and how it was meaningful to you in interviews and personal statements