

the scalpel

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WHAT DO I DO IF I DON'T GET IN?

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What do I do if I don't get in? First off, you are not alone. Admission to professional schools is a very competitive process. For most health professions, more applicants are rejected than accepted. For allopathic medicine, typically only 40-45% of applicants are admitted. Studies show that approximately 25% of accepted students in any given year are reapplicants. At my school, Western Kentucky University, over the last three admissions cycles 24.7% of students accepted to medical school were reapplicants and 34.6% of students accepted to dental school were reapplicants. So, if you do not get in, and you are passionate about a health career, you must try, and try again. I have had students accepted on their third, fourth and even fifth application cycle.

While persistence counts for something, and the admissions process can seem a bit capricious at times, submitting the same application year after year and expecting a different result is a sign of excessive optimism.

Once you have come to grips with the fact that you were not admitted this year and you have had time to "mourn" that fact, you need to work at improving your application to increase your chances of being admitted. The first step is recognizing and understanding the weaknesses of your application. Once identified, you must work on those areas that need improvement. It is human nature to want to do more of what you enjoy doing and neglect activities that you find more difficult or less enjoyable. You must be objective in your assessment.

Self-Assessment

Did you get a secondary application? Did you get an interview? If not, this may be due to a weak academic performance, i.e. Admission Test score, GPA, and/or Science GPA. Is your GPA and test score at the average or above average for the schools you have applied to? The admissions department is trying to judge if you are capable of success in their program and a measure of that is

past academic success. Once a student has 120+ credit hours, it is very difficult to have a significant impact on your GPA by taking or retaking a couple of additional courses. A student with 120 credit hours and a 3.5 GPA takes two, 4 credit hour classes and gets an A in both. What's the new GPA? 3.53! There may be many reasons to continue taking classes after graduation, but GPA improvement should not be the primary reason. Admissions may have

level/ graduate level science classes and perform well. It is important to know that if you enter a Master's Program, you should plan on finishing the program. Other options to consider if you do not want to miss an application cycle are: pre-medical post baccalaureate programs or to continue taking classes at your undergraduate institution as a non-degree seeking student. If you have a strong GPA and Science GPA, but uncompetitive test scores, then your



DON'T BE THIS GUY! PERSISTENCE AND A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE YOUR DOSSIER WILL GREATLY ENHANCE YOUR APPLICATION.

reservations about a student's ability to succeed in professional school if they took a less than rigorous course load, but may be convinced if you take one or two semesters of a full load of upper

focus needs to be on improving your test score. Did you adequately prepare for the test? In recent years more and more students enroll in a formal test preparation class. In my experience,

around 75% of our applicants have done some type of formal test preparation, whether it was in our in-house inter-professional test prep class or a for-profit commercial course. Some students choose to go it alone, because it may be the most efficient use of their time. With on-line resources from the AAMC, ADA, etc., and on-line content material from the Khan Academy for example, a student can prepare adequately on their own. The key is putting in the time. There are no shortcuts or secrets to be revealed, despite what the commercial test-prep companies may insinuate.

Did you receive an interview, but were not offered a seat in the next class? You are not alone. Some schools interview as many as 800 (highly qualified) candidates for 100 seats. More typically a school may interview 400 to 500 for roughly 150 seats. For every student who was offered admission, another 1 or 2 were not. If you received an interview, the school thought you were capable of academic success there. Perhaps your personal statement, letters of evaluation, and/or interview gave them reason to doubt that you would be successful (despite your perceived ability) or should be a member of that profession (maybe not a good fit for you). A perceived lack of commitment or passion about your chosen profession may be a concern. You can demonstrate passion and commitment through your personal statement and the activities section of your application. Do you have

adequate clinical exposure? Do you have realistic views and expectations of the profession?

What can you do to address the perception that you are uncommitted or dispassionate about the profession? Get additional clinical experience or more exposure through shadowing. Talk with people who work in the health profession, shadow your family doctor or dentist, or volunteer at the local hospital or clinic. Have knowledgeable people read your personal statement and get some additional experience with interviewing through practice. On most campuses these services can be found at the Career Services Office, Scholar Development Office, Pre-Health Professions Advisory Office, and/or the local Area Health Education Center (AHEC). Professionals in these offices can be a great help with your personal statement and interview skills.

Schedule an appointment with your pre-health advisor

Explore the strengths and weaknesses of your application with your advisor. It will help if you bring a copy of your completed application with you, or send it to your advisor in advance of your meeting. Be aware that there is generally not an easy fix. There are few quick fixes unless the problem was the timing of the application or that maybe you applied to the wrong

schools. Admission to professional schools is on a rolling basis. Qualified students are interviewed and admitted on a first-come first served basis. Many schools are oversubscribed even before the final application deadline. Apply early! Your advisor can also help you develop a list of schools at which you would be more competitive. You should be open to other possibilities. For example, consider applying to osteopathic medical schools if you have not done so already. Investigate off-shore veterinary or medical schools to see if they are for you. Be open to waiting a year to reapply and using that time to seriously consider other possibilities and seriously addressing the weaknesses in your application.

Contact Admissions for their Feedback

Health professions schools' admissions staff may consult with unsuccessful candidates by phone or an in person interview. They will often relay feedback from the Admissions Committee to the candidate as to why they were not selected. The student should be aware that admissions staffs are incredibly busy at certain times of the year, like interview season, and may not have time to counsel you until after the current class is matriculated. These meetings typically take place over the summer. These counseling sessions are usually done by the assistant director of admissions. If the student wants to

apply for the next cycle, this does not give you a lot of time to make changes before submitting and so self-assessment and discussions with your pre-professional advisor is invaluable.

If you work hard to improve those areas where you were weakest, and possibly turn application liabilities into assets, your next application is far more likely to land you a seat in the professional school of your choice.