



Shadowing Health Professionals

Shadowing is an excellent way to begin to learn about a health profession. When you are shadowing, you accompany a health professional as they go about their daily tasks at work. You may be able to listen as a physician speaks with a patient, watch medical procedures and sit in on conferences and presentations. While shadowing, you will not be able to directly interact with patients, unless specifically directed by the health professional, but shadowing is an excellent opportunity to learn what health professionals do on a daily basis and learn how health professionals interact with patients and each other.

How to find health professionals to shadow:

1. Work your network! If you have a family member or family friend who is a health professional, ask them if you can shadow them. Your family member/friend may also have contacts that you can ask. Remember, all health professionals were once where you are now 😊
2. Volunteer at a hospital or clinic. Once you have established a relationship with the organization, ask physicians or other health professionals you have met if you can shadow them.
3. Volunteer or work in a physician's office. You may be hired as a medical assistant, which is great as you will be able to directly interact with patients while working with the physician/health professional. Working as a receptionist is also great, because as you establish a relationship with the physicians, you can ask about shadowing opportunities, or even move to a medical assistant role over time.

Importance of privacy:

1. HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, is US legislation that provides data privacy and security provisions for safeguarding medical information. This law focuses on privacy and security of patient health information and limits the disclosure of this information without patient authorization.
2. Patient privacy and confidentiality are also key components of the Code of Medical Ethics. Adherence to the Code of Medical Ethics allows patients to trust that their physicians will protect information shared in confidence.
3. Due to HIPAA and the need for privacy and confidentiality, some health professionals may not allow students to shadow them. Others will ask the patient whether they will allow a student to be present in the exam room. Recognize that some patients may not feel comfortable with people other than their physician to be present.

Keep track of what you do

1. You are gaining important experience that you will include in your application to health professional programs. Keep a spreadsheet or other document that contains who you shadowed and their contact information, how long you shadowed them, and where you did this.
2. Include some notes about what you learned from the experience. What did you enjoy and why? What did you not enjoy and why? Is this a health professional whom you would like to emulate? Why or why not? Would you do anything different if you were in the health professional's place? What and why?