Guidelines for Clinical Shadowing Experiences for Pre-medical Students

These guidelines were established by the Association of American Medical College’s (AAMC) Group on Student Affairs (GSA), Committee on Admissions (COA) in consultation with National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (NAAHP), the American Medical Association (AMA), and Dr. Elizabeth Kitsis, director of bioethics education, assistant professor, Epidemiology and Population Health and Medicine of Albert Einstein COM.

Purpose:

The following guidelines are intended to be used as a model and by no means are intended to supersede any agreements already established. Advisors, students and others are welcome to adopt all or portions of this document for the use of pre-medical students interested in pursuing a career in medicine. These guidelines also suggest a protocol for a physician – pre-medical student agreement as it relates to patient interaction. These guidelines are not a legal document. It is a framework established to help pre-medical students understand the difference between shadowing and volunteering, potential learning objectives of the experience, their expected responsibilities, as well as appropriate code of conduct. These guidelines are intended to be used by either the pre-medical student or the physician to initiate the conversation of expectations related to the shadowing experience.

Introduction: Guidelines for Clinical Shadowing Experiences for Pre-medical Students

Learning what it means to be a physician is essential for college students considering a career in medicine. Participation in a variety of activities that provide exposure to diverse health care settings can help achieve this goal. These activities allow students to gauge and affirm their interest in medicine as a career. Shadowing is different from volunteering; volunteering enables a pre-medical student the unpaid opportunity to help in a healthcare setting. Depending on the clinical environment, volunteering might include filing paperwork, answering phones, reading a book or playing a game with a child. Shadowing experiences, however, are observational in nature. The pre-medical student observes as the healthcare professional provides care to patients. This may occur in varied clinical settings including hospitals, outpatient clinics, long term care facilities and/or private practice. Observation always occurs under the appropriate supervision of a licensed physician or other licensed health care professional.

A shadowing experience not only provides an introduction to the profession of medicine and the day-to-day responsibilities of the health care provider, but 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 pre-medical student and the patient regarding the importance of the patient’s rights, privacy and confidentiality.

Since the primary purpose of shadowing is observation, the experience should focus on watching the physician as s/he performs his or her duties. The pre-medical 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.
Learning objectives for the pre-medical student:

- Determine the fit of the profession including aptitude, dedication, and attributes needed to pursue and practice medicine
- Enhance knowledge of how the patient perspective impacts quality care
- Better understand the roles of the health care team

Pre-medical student responsibilities:

- Provide proof of required immunizations or immunity (i.e., MMR, Varicella (or had chicken pox), Td, TB) prior to shadowing.
- Complete HIPAA compliance training or review the training provided by the healthcare provider prior to shadowing experience.

Code of Conduct for Premedical Students Participating in Shadowing

When shadowing a physician, students should:

1. Arrive promptly.
2. Accurately represent my position and role.
3. Appreciate the limits of my role as an observer by not engaging in activities like, but not limited to, diagnosing diseases, administering medications, performing surgical procedures, suturing, providing medical advice or other tasks generally reserved for the trained health professional.
4. Respect patients’ rights to refuse to have students present.
5. Treat all patients and staff with respect and dignity, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation.
6. Maintain strict confidentiality and privacy about patient information.
7. Maintain honesty and integrity by being forthright in my interactions with patients, peers, physician supervisors and staff.
8. Ensure patient safety by remaining at home if I am ill; and will notify physician of my planned absence.
9. Report concerns about patient safety to the physician who is being shadowed.
10. Behave in an appropriate, professional, courteous manner at all times.
11. Not initiate or accept patients’ invitations to engage in social or social media relationships.
12. Dress and act professionally.
13. Not abuse drugs or alcohol.
14. Be aware of and follow the guidelines of my sponsoring institution and of the setting in which I am an observer.