

Advice for Health Profession Shadowing

*The key to shadowing is learning about, growing in, and more fully understanding your field of interest.
Make the most of your shadowing experience!*

STEP 1: Research and contact different health professionals in the field you want to shadow.

- Be kind, courteous, and most of all show some enthusiasm towards learning and becoming a part of the health profession. Your passion and excitement will leave a lasting impression.
- Identify potential opportunities to shadow.
 - Shadow at large and small hospitals, as well as private practice, community health centers, free clinics, and hospice centers. Even non-clinical settings, such as public health offices are an option.
 - Contact family physicians, dentists, PTs, and other health professionals that you already know in your home town. You may feel more comfortable starting with these professionals.
 - Contact the Pre-Health Pathways Advisor for assistance identifying and connecting with professionals and facilities.
- Contact organizations.
 - Send an email or call directly to inquire about shadowing.
 - Keep in mind that private or small practices, such as those involved with dental, physical or occupational therapy, or veterinary, will probably be easiest to make and maintain contact with due to their size. Hospitals and larger institutions may be busier and require multiple follow up contacts. Don't give up!
 - Confirm dates, times, length of shadowing if possible, and any other details before your first day arrival (check-in procedures, documentation needed, dress code etc.).
 - Each facility may have different requirements for vaccinations or acknowledgement of confidentiality/privacy policies.

STEP 2: It's your first day shadowing! Here's what to expect and what to do.

- Expect:
 - To be standing around and watching everything the health professional does.
 - To possibly feel awkward or out of place.
 - The health professional may ask the patients if they are okay with you observing and a patient may say no. Don't take it personally.
- Do:
 - Find out the professional's preference for asking questions – during or after patient interactions?
 - Ignore any awkwardness or feeling of being out of place while a procedure or consultation is happening. Everyone who has shadowed has been through it! Consider it a rite of passage of sorts.
 - Greet everyone and smile. Address everyone formally unless told otherwise.
 - Bring something small to take notes on. Pay attention.
 - People to observe: The health professional, other employees, patients and their families.
 - Work environment factors to observe: Workload and pace, team work and team cohesion, communication styles, attitude and work values.
 - Work style factors to observe: Skills required, procedures/interventions being performed, type and length of patient interaction, equipment used, and variety of tasks performed.
 - Ask questions if appropriate but don't interrupt a procedure. Remember you're a guest.
 - Dress business casual, unless directed otherwise:
 - Women: Slacks, blouse or button shirt, short heels or nice flats (pants are encouraged in clinical environments to protect your legs from chemicals and body fluids).
 - Men: Slacks, button shirt, dress shoes.

STEP 3: Day one is done. Figure out what you know and don't know about people who work in this profession.

- Do you know about their...
 - Lifestyle
 - Work schedule
 - Reasons to do a procure, process, etc. a certain way
 - Patient interactions
 - Skills required
 - Office dynamics

STEP 4: Further shadowing. Show interest and ask questions to find out what you want to know.

- Some good questions are:
 - What do you like best and least about your job?
 - If you had to do it over would you do anything differently?
 - How do you balance your family/personal life with this career?
 - How has the industry changed since you began working in it?
 - What is your advice on applying to, and choosing, a health professions school?
 - What are some trends you see in this profession?
 - How do you continue to grow your education or skills?

STEP 5: Reflect. Determine if this is the best career path for you!

- What did you like and dislike about the professional and job you were shadowing:

<i>Use this scale to rate your impressions:</i>										
1 (hated it!) – 5 (no opinion or don't know) – 10 (absolutely loved it!)										
Work schedule	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Patient contact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Stress level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Variety/routine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Based on your experiences, what are your next step(s) to determining the best career path for you?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

STEP 6: Thank your host(s).

When you have finished your shadowing experience, send a formal thank you letter! Let the professional(s) you have shadowed know how much you appreciate the time you spent with them. Point out specific elements of your shadowing that you found particularly helpful. Do not criticize or complain about what you saw, heard, or did during your experience. It is a privilege to shadow professionals, not a right. Your positive behavior and common courtesy could influence other students' ability to secure shadowing experiences with that professional in the future. Remember, too, that positive, sustained shadowing experiences can lead to supportive letters of recommendation!

Sample Inquiry Email

Dear Dr. _____,

I am a **(year in school, i.e. junior)** studying **(major)** at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. I am interested in a health career and would like to learn about (health profession) from the perspective of a professional. I am seeking a shadowing opportunity and hope you might allow me to observe your clinical interactions for a few hours on a day and time that works best for you. *(You can include the hours you are free here)*. I can complete any necessary forms and obtain required vaccinations or TB tests. Please let me know if you are able to accept a student shadow at this time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

(Include your contact information)

Note: This inquiry can be adapted for use in non-clinical health environments.