

How Do I... Make A Career Change Into Medicine?

Now more than ever, the demand for doctors, physician assistants, and anesthesiologist assistants is extremely high. And this demand is expected to continue for years to come. People are called to this career for many reasons – personal satisfaction in helping others, salary, job security – and sometimes that calling comes later in life. These professions require extensive and specific education and training, and this document provides initial information to help you explore the options.

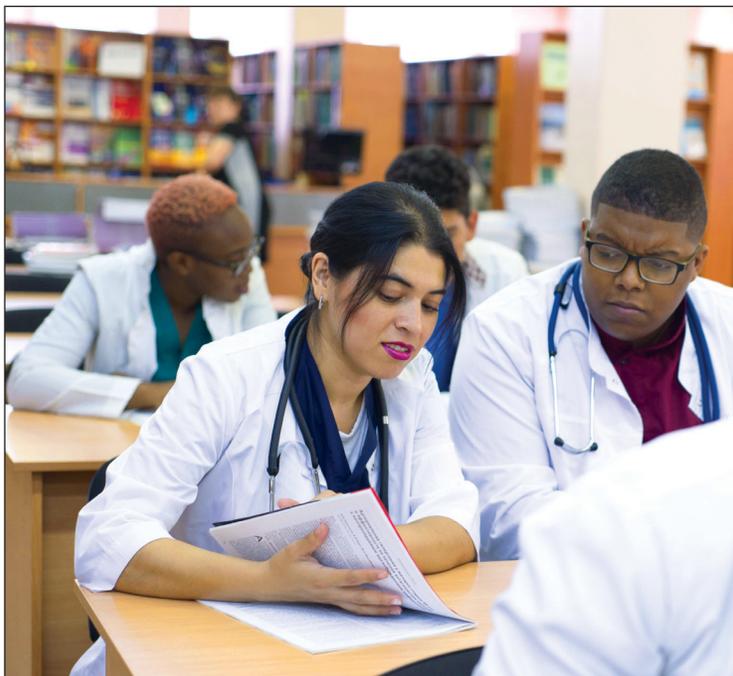
Career Outcomes

One of the first considerations is your desired job outcome. All professions in the medical field play an important role, but each serves a distinct purpose.

Doctors are the lead member of a medical team, making the diagnosis, charting a treatment plan, and bearing responsibility for outcomes.

Physician assistants can do some diagnosis and treatment planning but work under the supervision of a doctor.

Anesthesiologist assistants work under the supervision of a doctor who specializes in anesthesiology to assist them with patient care before, during and after surgery.



Required Education for the Career

Doctors must hold a Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree. These programs are four years in length, followed by a residency period of three to six years depending on specialty.

Physician assistants must hold a master's degree from a physician assistant program. These programs are two years in length.

Anesthesiologist assistants must hold a master's degree from an anesthesiologist assistant program. These programs are two years in length.

Acceptance rates into any of these graduate programs is extremely competitive, with far more applicants than there are seats available. The “assistant” programs are no easier to get into than medical school.

UWM does not offer any of these graduate programs.

Academic Preparation for Graduate School

All three of these graduate programs require an undergraduate background in science and math. With just slight variations, each program requires a similar preparation to include 6 semesters of chemistry, 4 or 5 semesters of biology, math through one semester of calculus, statistics, 2 semesters of physics, 1 semester of psychology, and other social science and English composition coursework.

It is these courses that also prepare students for the standardized test that is part of the graduate school application process. Either the MCAT or the PA-CAT are typically required and specifically test a student's knowledge in these areas of science and math.



A student who did not take these classes as part of his/her first degree can return to college as a non-degree student to pick up these needed classes.

For most of these graduate programs, these courses must also have been taken within 5 years of starting the graduate program so some students may find they need to re-take the class even if they previously took it.

Additionally, the necessary classes are very specific. For example, a survey of biology class would not meet the requirements since it is designed for non-science majors. Only a foundational, lab-based biology class will count. Similarly, a “chemistry for nurses” course would not meet the requirements. Students would work with an advisor to determine exactly what needs to be taken.

Applying to UWM as a Non-Degree Student

UWM accepts applications for non-degree students for any start term. Apply at apply.wisconsin.edu as a non-degree student. Transcripts are not required for a non-degree application, however you should keep a copy of your transcript handy because you will need to show that you meet any prerequisites each time you register for a class with prerequisites.

Timeline for Undergraduate Preparation

A student who is starting the 6-semester chemistry sequence from the beginning because he/she has no previous chemistry education should expect to spend three years in undergraduate coursework. The chemistry sequence can only be done one-course-at-a-time because each course builds on the previous one.

Once the required coursework is completed, students would be able to take the required MCAT or PA-CAT test. Taking the test prior to completing the coursework is not recommended as the test covers content from these courses. In addition to the coursework, many students find the need other test preparation such as a private test prep course or study guides.

It is common that the transition time between starting the preparatory work and starting graduate school is three-and-a-half to four years.

Other Preparation for Graduate School

In addition to the academic preparation, all three of these graduate programs require a record of hands-on related experience. This could include volunteer or paid work in the healthcare field. Some students will work part-time at a hospital or clinic and others will get jobs as certified nursing assistants (CNA), emergency medical technicians (EMT), or other first responder roles.

Obtaining sufficient hours in the healthcare field can be worked on while attending courses part-time.

Financial Aid for Non-Degree Students

Once a student has a bachelor’s degree, the options for financial aid are greatly limited. Students are no longer eligible for any state or federal grants.

Students who cannot pay outright for tuition often must turn to bank loans or other private loans.

Consultation with an advisor is recommended to explore your options.

Contact Info

For more information about returning to school to prepare for a career change into healthcare, please contact an admissions counselor at let-sci@uwm.edu.