

# Primary Care Medicine

Family Medicine ♦ General Internal Medicine ♦ Pediatrics



# What is Primary Care?



- The Institute of Medicine defines primary care as “the provision of integrated, accessible health care services by clinicians who are accountable for addressing a large majority of personal health care needs, developing a sustained partnership with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community.”
- Research shows that health care outcomes and costs in the United States are strongly linked to the availability of primary care physicians. Preventive care, care coordination for the chronically ill, and continuity of care – all hallmarks of primary care medicine – can achieve better health outcomes and cost savings. Patients with access to a regular primary care physician have lower overall health care costs than those without one, and health outcomes improve.
- The Affordable Care Act in 2010 emphasizes primary care through measures that:
  - Increase patient access to health care insurance coverage,
  - Incentivize the provision of preventive health care services and align health care provider payments with patient health outcomes, and
  - Increase the primary care physician workforce.
- Utilizing primary care physicians puts an emphasis on the physician-patient relationship by shifting the focus from physician-centered care to patient-centered care.

# Three Specialties in Primary Care

- **Family medicine** is the medical specialty which provides continuing, comprehensive health care for the individual and family. It is a specialty in breadth that integrates the biological, clinical and behavioral sciences. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes, each organ system and every disease entity.
- **Internal medicine** physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.
- **Pediatrics** is primarily concerned with the physical, emotional, and social health of children from birth to young adulthood. Concerned with more than just the physical well-being, pediatricians are involved with the prevention, early detection, and management of behavioral, developmental, and functional social problems that affect their patients. A pediatrician deals with biological, social, and environmental influences on the developing child as well as with the impact of disease or dysfunction on development.

# Medical Training in Primary Care

- Primary care physicians first complete their medical school training (called **undergraduate medical education**) in accredited MD or DO programs.
- Internal medicine and pediatrics are required clerkships during medical school that provide a taste of the specialties. Family medicine is sometimes required, or may be taken as an elective rotation.
- During fourth year, medical students will work with their faculty advisers to select elective rotations that will help them narrow down and prepare for their future career choice.
- After graduating from medical school, students enter residency, or **graduate medical education**, to continue training. Family medicine, general internal medicine, and pediatrics are all three year residency programs.
- Sample residency program websites:
  - U of North Carolina Primary Care Residency Program:  
[Med.UNC.edu/IM/Education/Internal-Medicine-Residency-Program](https://med.unc.edu/im/education/internal-medicine-residency-program)
  - Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Pediatric Residency Program:  
[CHOP.edu/Pediatric-Residency-Program#.VUN4YvlSp8E](https://chop.edu/pediatric-residency-program#.VUN4YvlSp8E)
  - Duke Family Medicine Residency Program:  
[DukeFamilyMedResidency.MC.Duke.edu/](https://DukeFamilyMedResidency.MC.Duke.edu/)

# Practice Options

- Education
- Emergency Medicine and Urgent Care
- Hospitalist
- Inpatient Medicine
- International and Wilderness Medicine
- Maternity Care
- Multispecialty Group Practice
- Procedures
- Public Health
- Research
- Rural or Urban Practice
- Sports Medicine... and [more!](#)



# Lifestyle and Income

- Family physicians frequently cite their specialty as rewarding for numerous reasons:
  - It allows them to maintain “life balance” while also managing a schedule that’s busy enough to accommodate patients with an array of needs.
  - One family physician noted that “family medicine is among the most gratifying of all medical specialties. The variety and clinical challenges it offers are endless, which promises a lifetime of stimulation and learning.”
  - Because family physicians are needed in every part of the country, they have the option to choose their location and work in urban or rural settings, to pick their practice environment and scope of practice, and to pursue different career paths, such as public health, teaching, and research.
- The AAMC reports starting salaries for primary care physicians:
  - Family Practice (with OB): \$161,000
  - General Pediatrics: \$160,000
  - General Internal Medicine: \$180,000
- Primary care physicians are also eligible for a number of loan forgiveness / repayment incentive programs that may help ease med school debt burden

# Medical schools that produce a high percentage of family medicine residents



- University of North Dakota .....23.3%
- University of Kansas.....19.2%
- Oregon Health & Science University..... 19%
- University of Missouri – Columbia .....18.8%
- East Carolina University .....18.6%
- University of Minnesota.....18%
- University of Washington.....17.6%
- University of Nebraska .....16.7%

The [AAMC Medical School Admissions Requirements](#) guide provides statistics on percentage of MD graduates entering each specialty, as well as each school's efforts in promoting primary care.

# In The Words of Family Physicians

*What would you tell an undecided medical student who is considering family medicine?*



“Family and primary care medicine provide a unique opportunity to directly interact with and impact the community in which you work. Family physicians are central to the provision of health care and we are typically the first contact the patient has with the health care system. Because of the broad training we receive in family medicine residencies, family physicians are really able to branch off into any number of unique practice niches. You will find family physicians in the emergency room and practicing obstetrics and office gynecology, behavioral health, aviation medicine, urgent care medicine, preventive/travel medicine and sports medicine, as well as in health care administration roles and hospital leadership roles. There is no other specialty that offers the diversity in practice and lifestyle as family medicine.” (Devry C. Anderson, MD, military surgeon for the Warrior Transition Brigade, Fort Hood, TX, and owner and chief medical officer for Quick Care Walk In Clinic, North Austin, TX)



“As a family physician you are privileged, you get to know and treat the patient's emotional and physical needs. You get to take a patient-centered approach rather than a disease-centered approach, and you get to take care of them from birth to death and watch their lives unfold before them. Nothing could be more rewarding and satisfying.” (Flora Sadri-Azarbeyejani, DO, MPH, FAAFP, medical director of the Community Health Center of Franklin County, Greenfield, MA)



“Family medicine has so much breadth and diversity in careers for all kinds of people. I would especially consider it if you are a generalist, want meaningful relationships with your patients, are interested in public health, teaching, or policy, or want to be part of the solution to American health care.” (Frederick Chen, MD, MPH, associate professor of medicine at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA, and owner of the clinical practice at Seattle's Harborview Family Medical Clinic, Seattle, WA.)

# For More Information...

- Association of American Medical Colleges: [AAMC.org](http://AAMC.org)
  - Family Medicine: [AAMC.org/CIM/Specialty/List/US/336840/Family\\_Medicine.html](http://AAMC.org/CIM/Specialty/List/US/336840/Family_Medicine.html)
  - Internal Medicine: [AAMC.org/CIM/Specialty/List/US/336842/Internal\\_Medicine.html](http://AAMC.org/CIM/Specialty/List/US/336842/Internal_Medicine.html)
  - Pediatrics: [AAMC.org/CIM/Specialty/List/US/336860/Pediatrics.html](http://AAMC.org/CIM/Specialty/List/US/336860/Pediatrics.html)
- American Academy of Family Physicians: [AAFP.org](http://AAFP.org)
- American Board of Internal Medicine: [ABIM.org](http://ABIM.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [AAP.org](http://AAP.org)
- American Medical Association: [AMA-ASSN.org](http://AMA-ASSN.org)

## Articles of Interest

- [Responses to Medical Students' Frequently Asked Questions About Family Medicine](#)
- [Medical Students Perspectives: What are the Differences Between Internal Medicine and Family Medicine?](#)
- [How a New Three-Year Curriculum at UC Davis is Producing Primary Care Physicians](#)