

## MCAT<sup>2015</sup>: An Open Letter to Pre-Med Students



Dear future physician,

What will the health system of the future look like? What kind of physicians will it require?

While no one can answer these questions precisely, important shifts under way in health care make our response more relevant than ever. Our profession increasingly recognizes that our current health care model needs to do more to promote prevention and wellness for patients. Our nation is growing, aging, and becoming increasingly diverse, so physicians of the future must be more culturally competent. And patients, especially those with chronic conditions, will need a "medical home" in which their providers work as unified teams to coordinate their care, instead of the current fragmented approach.

In short, the health system of tomorrow will require a different kind of physician. And that is why, in 2015, there will be a new Medical College Admission Test (MCAT<sup>®</sup>).

For more than 80 years, the MCAT exam has been a valuable predictor of students' academic success in medical school. The coming changes to the test will make it an even better exam, by helping medical schools identify not only the students who are the most academically prepared to become physicians, but also those who have the potential to become the best doctors.

One of the biggest changes to the test in 2015 that will help medical schools make this assessment is a new section, the "Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior." Testing students' understanding of these areas

is important, because being a good physician is about more than scientific knowledge. It is about understanding people—how they think, interact, and make decisions. Together with a solid foundation in the natural sciences, an understanding of behavior, perception, culture, poverty, and other concepts from psychology and sociology all contribute to the well-rounded physician. Of course, we want our doctors to understand how chemical compounds interact so our prescriptions do not have adverse interactions. But we also want our doctors to have good bedside manner, communication skills, and an ability to interact with people. After nearly 60 years, I still remember my pediatrician, Dr. Bramley—not for his class rank or MCAT exam score, but for his kindness, compassion, and how much he truly cared.

This change does not mean that the MCAT<sup>2015</sup> will take the focus off core concepts from the natural sciences. The new test will still have two natural science sections, but the content will be updated to stay current with the exponential growth of medical knowledge, focusing on the areas medical school educators and students think are most important for medical school. Along with some new topics in biology, chemistry, and physics, concepts that are taught at many colleges in first-semester biochemistry will be tested in two sections: "Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems" and "Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems."

Thinking about the rapid increases in medical knowledge brings me to another feature of the 2015 exam: the new "Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills" section, which is designed to help medical schools assess how you think by asking you to analyze passages from a wide range of disciplines, including ethics, philosophy, cultural studies, and even population health. No longer is it humanly possible to memorize every fact relevant to the practice of medicine. What is more important for physicians of the future is an ability to think critically and to have the necessary reasoning skills to know where to seek answers and how to solve problems in the clinical environment.

One of the most pressing questions I am sure you have, is how you can prepare for the MCAT<sup>2015</sup>. While the revised test is still a few years away, we recognize that it will have an effect on what courses you take as an undergraduate if you are beginning college as

early as fall 2012. The MCAT<sup>2015</sup> preview guide ([www.aamc.org/mcat2015/preview.pdf](http://www.aamc.org/mcat2015/preview.pdf)) is an excellent place to start your preparation. This resource gives detailed information on each of the test's four sections and even includes sample questions. *The Official Guide to MCAT<sup>2015</sup>* will be released in 2014, along with a full-length practice exam. Another practice test will be available in 2015. We also are working closely with undergraduate health professions advisors to teach them new ways to help you best plan your studies.

You may be wondering how each of the four sections will be weighted in the admissions process. We intend to leave this decision to the individual medical schools, because some focus on training the next generation of physician-scientists and others seek to strengthen the primary care workforce. Because of this difference in focus, these institutions are likely to weigh the MCAT exam sections differently, according to their core mission. The AAMC's Medical School Admissions Requirements, an online resource that provides extensive information about each medical school (available at [www.aamc.org/MSAR](http://www.aamc.org/MSAR)), can help you select a school that fits your goals and aspirations.

Though the MCAT exam is the gateway to a career in medicine and other health professions, we at the AAMC see it as just one resource in what will become a suite of tools that help schools assess applicants like you more holistically. We are thinking in new ways about evaluating letters of recommendation and how to measure the personal attributes vital to medicine, such as empathy, dependability, and integrity. We also are helping schools transform the medical school interview process to get to know who you are, in addition to what you know.

Let me be among the first to congratulate you on considering a career in medicine. Becoming a doctor is one of the most rewarding career paths I can imagine. I wish you success, and I can assure you that the AAMC will serve as a resource on your journey to becoming a physician.

Sincerely,

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.  
President and CEO  
AAMC