

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONS

What is an Informational Interview?

- A type of networking in which you meet with a professional in a field of interest to gather information about an occupation or industry before deciding on a particular career path or specialty. It is also a great way to begin building your professional network.
- For health related careers, informational interviewing can supplement shadowing by allowing you to have the undivided attention of a clinician to ask specific questions and get a different perspective outside of the working environment.

Where to Start:

- Research the occupation thoroughly online first:
 - Reference the “Quick Tips” on the [Continuing Education Pre-Health Advising Profession-Specific Details](#) Page
 - [O*Net Online](#)
 - [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
- Brainstorm the types of clinicians, specialties and work environments that you are interested in learning more about:
 - MD/DO, PA, DPT, DVM, PharmD, OD, BSN, etc.
 - Primary care, medical specialty, or surgical specialty
 - Hospitals/emergency medicine, private clinics/offices (consider solo vs. group practices), an HMO (such as Kaiser), academia, government, etc.
 - Are there particular populations that you are interested in working with?
 - Rural/urban locations, elderly, children, vulnerable/marginalized, mental health, etc.
- Keep in mind that meeting with a variety of providers (who work in a variety of settings) will offer greater perspective when making an informed career decision.

Identifying Connections:

- Three Levels of Contacts:
 - Who do you know already?
 - Make a list of people that you know that work in a health-related profession
 - Family members, friends, past and present colleagues, acquaintances, neighbors, etc.
 - Who can you be easily connected to?
 - Even if members of your established network do not know anyone directly, they will likely know someone else that is in a health-related profession or industry. Ask them if they are willing to make an introduction.
 - New connections?
 - Opportunities to meet new connections:
 - Professional Associations (i.e., AMA, AAPA, ANA, etc.) – some (but not all) maintain lists of practicing clinicians who are open to providing shadowing experiences or serving as a mentor to pre-health students.
 - Conferences (in person or virtual) or meetups

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- LinkedIn
 - Connect with alumni, join groups and engage in the conversation
- Alumni services available through your alma mater

Asking for the Informational Interview:

- Once you have identified (or been introduced to) potential professionals that you would like to speak with, reach out with an email and/or a phone call
 - Introduce yourself and mention who recommended that you call.
 - Explain you are doing some career exploration, mention the mutual contact who referred you and explain that you would like to meet with her/him for about 20-30 minutes to learn about the occupation.
- Offer several options to meet: in person, over the phone, or via video conference.

Preparing for the Informational Interview:

- Refer to the list of questions at the end of this document.
- Bring a laptop/tablet/notepad with your list of questions and a way to take notes during the conversation.

Completing an Informational Interview:

- Formulate questions based on what you are hoping to learn about an occupation.
- Meet with your leads in the agreed upon format. If you are meeting in person at a coffee shop for example, it is always polite to offer to buy their cup of coffee or tea.
- Be on time and dress business casual. Take your written questions with you to the meeting.
- At the end of the meeting, ask them for a referral to another person in the occupation with whom you could meet. That's usually an easy way to be introduced to additional professionals.

After the Informational Interview:

- Right after your informational interview; write a journal entry about your experience, including any details you want to remember such as small talk and general impressions about the occupation.
 - Ask yourself questions like:
 - What did I learn?
 - What did I like about the occupation?
 - What did not appeal to me?
 - Is this the kind of job/work environment I want?
 - What additional information would be helpful to learn?
- Send a thank you note later that day (or the next day at the latest). This can be handwritten or an e-mail.
- When you follow up with a lead, contact (via email or a phone call) the person who recommended the lead, thank them, and let them know you followed through.

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SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Here are some questions you may want to ask. Pick only the ones appropriate for each interview.

To get acquainted and to learn about background:

- * Why did you decide to become a MD/DO, PA, DPT, DVM, etc.?
- * What was your career path into this line of work?
- * What school did you attend? Where did you complete your residency?
- * How or why did you choose your specialty?
- * If you were starting out again, what would you do differently?
- * What personality traits do you think are needed to be effective in this job?
- * What key qualifications and skills are needed to do this job well?
- * What are the career paths for this type of work?
- * What do you like the most about your job?
- * If you were not in this career, what would you be doing?

To learn about the work environment:

- * What is a typical workday like? A typical week?
- * How much time do you generally have with your patients?
- * Please describe the work setting and work conditions.
- * What are the most difficult problems and decisions with which you are faced?
- * How did you view this career before you got into it?
- * What do you perceive as the major rewards and challenges to this field?
- * What challenges might someone new to this career have in adjusting to it?

Advice and next steps:

- * Where else could I find people who do this type of work? Who else do you recommend I talk to?
- * What professional organizations do you suggest? What reading do you suggest?
- * What is the best advice you can give a person interested in this occupation?
- * What trends, changes, or issues do you see shaping the direction of this field in five to ten years?

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Sample Approach Email

Subject: Informational Interview Request

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am considering a career change from teaching to the healthcare field, and I would love to learn more about the work of a physician/PA/nurse. Janet Rodgers highly recommended you as an excellent resource due to your expertise in the field.

If you're open to it, I would love to chat for about 15-20 minutes so I can ask you some questions and learn about your experiences. I can only imagine how busy you must be, so I am happy to work around your schedule. I can also send along a couple of questions via e-mail if that's easier for you. Thank you in advance for considering my request.

All the best,

Jessie

Informational Interview Request Template for LinkedIn

Subject: Informational Interview Request

Dear Ms. Smith,

My name is Jessie Taylor and I am a post-baccalaureate pre-health student at CU Boulder. I recently came across your LinkedIn profile and was intrigued by your experience as I'm considering a career change to the medical field. I also noticed you're a CU Boulder alum.

As an aspiring physician, I'd love to learn more about the skills you've used in your career and if you have any advice for getting started. I would love to schedule a short meeting to ask you a few questions. I'm sure you're busy, so even 15 to 30 minutes of your time would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Jessie