

## **HEALTH PROFESSIONS OFFICE**

### **OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE**

A Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.) is a fully trained physician who prescribes drugs, performs surgery and uses all other methods consistent with a medical practice. The osteopath also pays close attention to the neuromuscular-skeletal relationship that influences all the other organs and systems of the human body in both health and disease. Osteopaths preach the virtues of holistic medicine and a large percentage of osteopaths practicing in this country are engaged in primary care (family medicine).

Osteopathic medicine began in the 1870's as a reform movement that sought to make American health care more effective and more scientific. Today, it is the fastest-growing health care field, with more than 32,000 practitioners and fifteen colleges- triple the number in 1969. While the overwhelming majority of doctors of osteopathy (DO's) engage in the practice of medicine, others are primarily teachers, researchers, or health care policy leaders. Admission to an osteopathic medical school is very selective. Specific courses in such fields as biology, chemistry, physics, and the behavioral sciences are required for admission, although there is not a required major.

In most osteopathic medical schools, the first two years are devoted primarily to the basic sciences, which include anatomy, pharmacology, physiology, microbiology, immunology, medical biochemistry, pathology, hematology, neurology, and psychiatry. The second two years are more heavily clinical in orientation, and the student spends much of his/her time in hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices to learn the science and art of patient care. Osteopathic medical students are taught the use of all accepted methods of diagnosis and treatment including drugs, surgery, radiation, and manipulation. Clinical instruction emphasizes looking at the whole patient and how various body systems interrelate, rather than focusing on the particular disease or illness causing the most immediate problem. Close attention is also paid to the ways in which the musculoskeletal and nervous systems influence the functioning of the rest of the body. This "total body" approach is part of a distinct philosophy of health care that is taught to osteopathic students. Disease is seen as a disruption of the body's normal state of health, and treatment is viewed as a way of enhancing the body's natural defense mechanisms. This philosophy, which was propounded in the writings of early osteopathic educators, has gained wide acceptance in most medical circles in recent years.

About 60 to 70 percent of DO's go into family medicine or one of the other primary care fields – pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, internal medicine, or emergency medicine. In today's medical world, most DO's and MD's have high regard for the professional education and clinical skills of their associates from the other profession.

#### **Education**

There are 20 schools of Osteopathic Medicine in the United States. Most are private schools. The curriculum lasts four years. The students study anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pathology, microbiology, pharmacology, etcetera and are required to take the following clinical subjects: medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology, surgery, radiology, and preventative medicine. The students are also taught osteopathic principles that deal with the interrelationships of all body systems in health and disease, and are trained in osteopathic palpatory diagnosis and manipulative theory. After completing school, an internship/residency program must be completed before being licensed by the state and entering practice.

#### **Schools**

A.T. Still University of Health Sciences – Kirksville COM  
Arizona COM of Midwestern University  
Chicago COM of Midwestern University  
Des Moines University COM  
Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences COM  
Lake Erie COM  
Michigan State University COM  
Nova Southeastern University COM  
New York COM of the New York Institute of Technology

Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences COM  
Ohio University COM  
Philadelphia COM  
Pikeville COM  
Touro University COM – California  
University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey SOM  
University of New England COM  
University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth TCOM – uses the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service, not AACOMAS  
Edward via Virginia COM  
Western University of Health Sciences COMP  
Western Virginia SOM

**Course Requirements for Admission**

The basic premedical curriculum should be followed. See handout for Pre-Medical Preparation and Recommended Schedule for Pre-Med Courses.

**Required Tests**

All osteopathic medical schools require the MCAT for admission. The MCAT is now offered in a Computer-Based format, 19-22 times per year.

**Applying to Osteopathic Medical Schools**

Schools of osteopathic medicine can be applied to through the Association of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS). This application is available online. Some schools require that one of your letters of reference come from an osteopathic physician. This is to encourage you to talk to DO's and get to know what they do first-hand before applying.

Official transcripts and MCAT scores are submitted to AACOMAS; most schools then require a secondary application and letters of reference, sent to the individual school.

**For Further Information**

American Osteopathic Association  
142 East Ontario Street  
Chicago, IL 60611  
(312) 280-5800  
[www.am-osteo-assn.org](http://www.am-osteo-assn.org)

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine  
5550 Friendship Boulevard, Suite 310  
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815-7231  
[www.aacom.org](http://www.aacom.org)