

USMLE Student Tip #2

July 2007

1. What do you wish you had known last year when you were in the audience?

While 3rd year is a busy time where you feel like you're "going to work" each day for long hours, you are still truly a student and the focus is more on learning, both in knowledge and skills. There are many things that you already know by now, but if you need to see it and learn it again, that's totally ok. In fact, that's the point. Don't get too bogged down by "doing work." Enjoy the opportunities to learn and have fun.

2. How did you figure out the 'culture' in each clerkship?

It's possible to jump right in with each rotation, but I tended to let the first few days just be an adjustment period to finding out how my teams would run and set-up some expectations up front.

3. How did you figure out call rooms, scrubs, etc.

The best source is to ask another student who has done a rotation at your site before. If that is not available (i.e. your first rotation), then checking with the interns/residents is a good resource.

4. How did you maintain your sanity (or did you)?

Making sure to spend time outside of the hospital doing things you enjoy. It's not wise to give up outside interests and neglect your personal/social life.

5. What was the most fun?

Getting to do the history/physical and then work-up undifferentiated patients. Also, delivering babies was very fun.

6. What did you do, or see others do, when things went wrong? successful strategies?

Be sure to be humble. Acknowledge when you don't know how to do something or you don't know what somebody is talking about. But also don't take things too personally.

7. How did you ask for feedback?

You should gauge your residents/attendings to find out early what is a good way to get feedback from them. If you set goals or mention things that you are working on from the very start, then you can solicit feedback at any point regarding those things (and they'll know what you're talking about and why you care). Feedback can be casually gathered on a daily basis, i.e. "what did you think of my presentation?" Or, "how did you like the way I explained the CT scan result with my patient?"

8. What was your best pocket guide?

Epocrates on PDAs is useful and convenient. Sanford's is the best for antibiotic choice. Pocket Medicine (the blue pocket binder book) is excellent for Internal Medicine.

9. How did you feel a member of the team?

The role you play on a team will be dictated by how comfortable/prepared you are and how much you want it to be. As a 3rd year student, you should focus on learning, but also realize that you can be very helpful to the team if you take a good history or you are keeping up on a patient's lab results or if you've read a pertinent article on management of one of your patient's problems.

10. What should you listen closely for during orientation?

Schedules and meeting places. Knowing what is going on at what time and where it will be is a huge part of getting used to being in the hospital. Every rotation and hospital is different. After a while, it gets to be a routine, but if you are where you're supposed to be at the right time, the battle's half won.