

Academic Support Network
Student Suggestion Sheet
Family Medicine

Overview: Family Medicine is a discipline that tends to overwhelm many students, primarily when it is one of their first two clerkships of M3 year. The amount of knowledge seems immense, covering aspects of internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, geriatrics, orthopedics, neurology, social service, etc. etc.... The setting is usually an outpatient clinic of some sort with up to 100+ patients a day. There will be kids running around, elderly barely walking, and everything in between. It can be a demanding rotation that requires a systematic approach to each of the disciplines involved.

MUST DO #1: Go into the rotation with open eyes and ears. Try to truly learn from each patient, regardless of age or condition. There is a saying that one likes what one knows. Treat this rotation as one where you explore what it really is, until you know as much as you can, and then decide if you like it. You must complete the rotation regardless, so get the most out of it. Finally, understand that this may be one of the most valuable rotations, as you will learn how to treat all those people (including family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues) that will seek out your professional opinion later in life.

MUST DO #2: PLAN, PLAN, and PLAN your studying. You will be busy and this is a quick rotation. Devise a study plan that allows for reading time often. You can either base your reading on what you are seeing day in and day out, or you can simply read a book cover to cover. One could possibly start with general medical illnesses and treatments, then move on to pediatric illnesses followed by gender specific health issues, and finish up with elderly care issues. Several books are available, as are questions books. The point is to **USE** a textbook, and **PRACTICE** with questions books. **DO NOT THINK YOU WILL PASS THE SHELF EXAM WITH A QUESTION BOOK AS YOUR MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION!!!!** Family Medicine covers way too much ground, and clinic will be very challenging if you are not reading.

Books: Many people liked First Aid for Medicine, especially if you prefer an outline format. This doesn't cover all the bases, however, and you will need to use some Peds and some OB/Gyne references as well (like Blueprints for both). A text that is more comprehensive and directed at Family Med specifically is Swanson's Family Practice Review. It has questions, but is divided into topics which make a cohesive unit for studying. If you read one or two topics on your patients each night, you will find that you have very little to review before the shelf exam. It is, however, pretty long, so don't wait until the week before to begin studying if you want to use this book.

Now that you have an idea of how you should study, let us touch upon what tends to be important. **Warning:** The following is not intended to depict all you need to know and should not be interpreted as such. It is merely recommendations of what to know well, but does not exclude other material. However, rest assured that learning by doing is the most efficient way of covering ground. Seek out the opportunities to practice skills and be involved in patient care.

- **Clinical Portion:** As mentioned earlier, you will see everything from prenatal care, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and beyond. Recognize the MOST COMMON conditions and illnesses in each of those age groups. As always, your most important goal is to learn and perform a thorough History and Physical. Understanding medication usage is important, although memorizing prescribing information is not necessary. The following is listed by group:
 - **Prenatal care:** Understand importance of pre-conception visits and family counseling, as well as week-to-week and month-to-month prenatal care. Know the value of immunizations; risks of infections passed from mother to child, mom's health risks, etc. Know how to examine a pregnant woman.

- *Infancy/Childhood*: Know stages of development (Freud, Piaget, Erickson) and be able to correlate normal and abnormal findings. Learn how to use growth and weigh charts. Know immunizations. Be familiar with common complaints of earaches, coughs, colds, and flu. Be familiar with childhood rashes and their causes. Counsel parents on what to expect behaviorally at certain ages, know safety precautions around the home.
 - *Adolescent*: Understand awkwardness of period in patient's life. Be confident in your exam; learn to modify questions and approach to specific population. Always be aware of signs of depression, alcohol and drug use, physical or emotional stress and abuse, family dynamics, school performance, etc.... Understand sexual development, identify abnormal development. Counsel on sex-related matters including abstinence, birth control, rape, and peer pressure.
 - *Adulthood*: Important aspects are those commonly seen in the general population. Know symptoms, evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of DM, HTN, CAD, hypercholesterolemia, common infections, mental health, genito-urinary illness in both sexes (from menstrual abnormalities to benign prostatic hyperplasia), outside stressors, and job performance. Using an internal medicine book as reference, not a primary source, can be very helpful (CURRENT MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT, CECIL'S, HARRISON'S).
 - *Elderly*: Much of the same as adulthood, but be aware of mental health, nutritional health, everyday activities, etc...
 - *Emergency/Orthopedics/Social Work*: Invariably, you will see cases that require a trip to the ER for immediate attention, a specialist for further evaluation, or social work to make sure patients are receiving proper care and fair living circumstances. Be prepared to deal with all of these. Know and identify emergency cases (usually obvious), know basic orthopedic exams and understand what type of imaging to order, and be patient when trying to contact family member, nursing homes, etc...
- Shelf Exam: 100 multiple-choice questions. By this time, you have read a text or finished Swanson's Review and are familiar with most things. It is now up to you to fine-tune and review high yield points. These tests are notorious for throwing some curveballs, and often test your ability to take a test as much as your knowledge related to the clerkship. Focus on the topics discussed above, as the clinical experience guides the shelf exam. Memorize high yield info such as developmental stages, immunizations, diagnostic process for diabetes and HTN. Do plenty of practice questions for this test. While reading is paramount and necessary for back ground info, the questions prepare you for the variety of topics and depth of knowledge needed for the test. Do not spend too much time on difficult questions; move on if you do not know the answer. Answer all questions.

GOOD LUCK!!!