

How to Find Clinical Experience

*A guide for finding meaningful
opportunities in healthcare*

Hosted by:
San Francisco State University
Pre-Health Professions Post-Bac Program

OBJECTIVES



PANEL
INTRODUCTIONS



PANEL
QUESTIONS



COLD EMAILING
(TEMPLATE)



FINDING MEANING
IN YOUR
EXPERIENCES



Q&A

PANEL INTRODUCTIONS



Host

- Mike - program co-director and advisor

Panel

- David - admissions coordinator and former post-bac student
 - Katherine - admissions coordinator and current post-bac student
 - Sasha - current post-bac student
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PANEL QUESTIONS



Question 1

Describe a clinical experience for which you had to put in effort to obtain the position.

What were the steps?

How long did the process take?

Question 1 Responses

Sasha:

“I chose to become a certified phlebotomist (CPT-1); I attended Kaiser School of Allied health in Richmond, California for my training. This program required an application and an interview. The program is 12 weeks long; the first 6 weeks is didactic training, and the last 6 weeks is an externship at a local Kaiser hospital. After the 12 weeks, you are required to take and pass a state exam with a score over 70% to obtain your license.

After I passed my exam, I received my license in the mail and was able to apply for employment. I decided to become a phlebotomist because I wanted to experience direct patient care. Learning the different tests that are done in a lab and how they correlate to different illnesses triggered an interest in medicine for me, and I am grateful that I exposed myself to this type of clinical experience”

Question 1 Responses

Katherine:

“I volunteer at a free clinic in San Francisco. The steps I took to find that opportunity were to google volunteer opportunities at the major hospitals in my area, but many were not offering spots at the time. Eventually, I narrowed my search to the kind of work I really wanted to be involved in which was working with the Latino and uninsured populations. I searched free clinics and found the one I’m currently volunteering at and followed their process. It took about 2 months to complete the paperwork and about 5-6 months total from my initial searches to finally starting.”

Question 1 Responses

David:

“One of my first experiences in the clinic was through shadowing physicians. I had known of a few doctors that went to my church; I didn’t want to ask them right away because I thought that that would be a little impersonal. I made an effort to develop a relationship with them to make it more approachable to ask to shadow. After getting to know them for a few months, I expressed my interest in being a doctor and they happily suggested that they could take me under their wing and allow me to shadow them. They were able to ask around in their hospitals and get the appropriate paperwork completed. I was finally able to shadow two doctors, one being a ICU chief resident and the other being an Emergency Medicine attending physician. This process took about half a year, from getting to know them to the moment that I could shadow.”

Question 2

What advice would you give your past self regarding the search for clinical experience?

Question 2 Responses



Katherine:

“I would advise to not get discouraged throughout the process. Sometimes you will be told no or you will not hear back but it doesn't mean that the opportunities are not out there because they are. Be persistent and trust the process.”

Question 2 Responses

David:

“Don’t be afraid to put yourself out there. I was very timid and didn’t know how to use my voice yet; what I learned over the years is that sometimes you have to advocate for yourself and make it known of what you desire in your career. It can be scary to ask and face rejection but until you do, nothing new will happen in life. It also teaches you how to navigate these types of professional conversations the more you engage in it.”

Question 2 Responses

Sasha:

“I would tell myself to be more vocal and honest with people regarding my goals to solidify a peer group, with people possessing the same interests as my own. Although I am still establishing and building my network now, I can’t help but wonder what it would have looked like now if I began the process earlier. As networking has opened a lot of doors in my life to gain more exposure and perspective. After all, it’s not what you know, it’s who you know.”

Question 3

What has been the most meaningful aspect of your clinical experience?



Question 3 Responses

David:

“I believe the relationships that I was able to witness in the hospital was the most meaningful parts of being in a clinic. There’s a plethora of people that work together in a clinic: patient-doctor, doctor-doctor, doctor-medical assistant, medical assistant-medical scribe, and so on. Each of these relationships bring about a different side of you. I’ve seen what positive interactions there can be and how beneficial it is to the environment, along with some negative ones that bring everybody down. Ultimately, I learned that hospital work is a series of relationships that are built and the stronger the relationship, the better the work environment.”

Question 3 Responses

Sasha:

“I can say, the most meaningful aspect about being a phlebotomist is the fact that you have a wide range of patients. Whether they are doctors, attorneys, professors or even peers of my own. The amount of confidence I gained was insurmountable because I had to be sure of my skill set even if some patients were difficult or even intimidating.

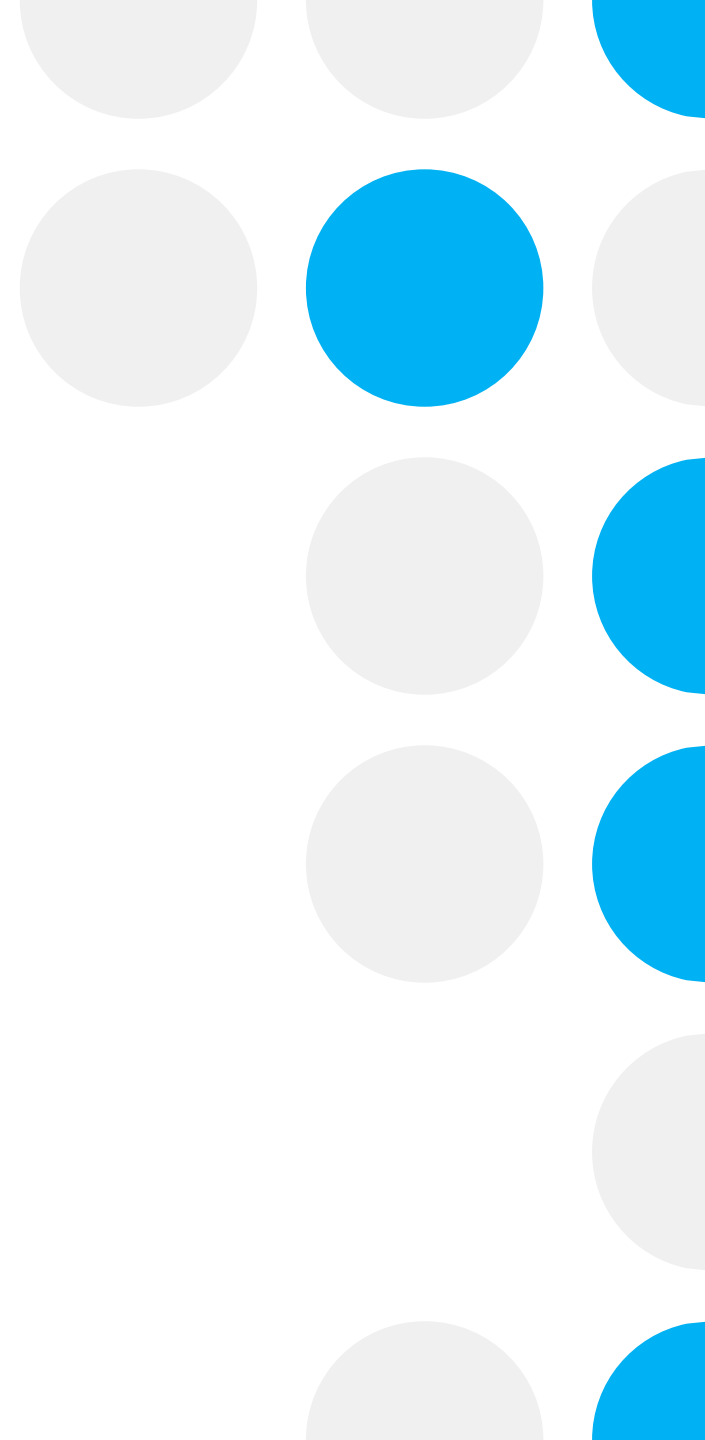
The amount of perspective I gained was also very memorable to me, from having patients that needed tests after chemo treatment, glucose tests for pregnant women or young infants that were just born. Being mindful of others and their challenges opened my eyes even further and gave me the drive to one day become a physician”

Question 3 Responses

Katherine:

“The most meaningful aspect has been seeing the different roles in medicine and realizing that this is truly what I want to do and pursue. Additionally, I’ve been able to observe and learn from the work that providers do and the way that they do it. It has taught me a lot and I feel that it will make me an even better provider later down the road.”

CLINICAL EXPERIENCES



What are the types of clinical opportunities?



Examples of Clinical Opportunities

- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Dental Assistant
- Medical Assistant* (front vs back end)
- Emergency Medical Technician
- Pharmacy Technician
- Phlebotomist
- Physical Therapy Aide
- Clinical Research Coordinator*
- Military Medic or Medical Corpsman
- Medical Scribe
- Translator
- Hospice volunteer
- Hospital or clinic volunteer

Things to Consider

- Patient Facing
- Provider Facing
- Industry Facing
- Hands on
- Hands off
- Research
- Volunteer
- Requires certification

Notes on Types of Clinical Opportunities

A few things that you may want to consider:

- Is it paid or volunteer (both are valuable)?
- Do you need a certificate or license?
- Is it patient facing (working closely with patients) and/or provider facing (working closely with providers)?
- Is it hands off (ie. scribe, translator, many volunteer roles) or hands on (ie. dental and medical assisting)

Industry experiences (healthcare adjacent industries like biotech, med device, public health): all experiences can boost your application and industry jobs are good for learning about what is out in the world; however, no matter what field you would like to enter, spending time working or volunteering in a clinic is valuable (and often necessary).

Some of clinical roles sound clinical, but they may not count:

- Front end medical assistant - considered administrative, unless actively involved in patient care.
 - Clinical Research Coordinator - if CRC is working to collect data from patients in the clinic, this may be considered clinical but if you are involved as a data entry CRC, it might not.
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What counts as clinical experience?

- Do I observe or interact with patients (generally in a manner different from appointments, billing or data entry)?
- Do I observe or interact with providers (as they provide patient care)?
- If you answer yes to at least one of the above, the position is likely clinical.

But note that PA schools, for example, often require that you be **directly involved** in patient care. For this reason, scribing and especially shadowing, while clinical, might not count for a clinical hours at particular PA program. Check individual PA program websites to find their requirements.

“The professional opportunities for physicians are quite wide, and include options in research, administration, and industry. However, if you are considering applying to medical school, you should know that the curriculum prepares you to be a competent clinician. With that in mind, **schools want you to bring some experience in the world of patient care. Your ability to speak first-hand of the impact of clinical volunteer work** on your future career plans is a compelling aspect of the selection and admissions process. I feel that it makes sense to postpone applications until you have accumulated **at least one year of clinical experiences.**”

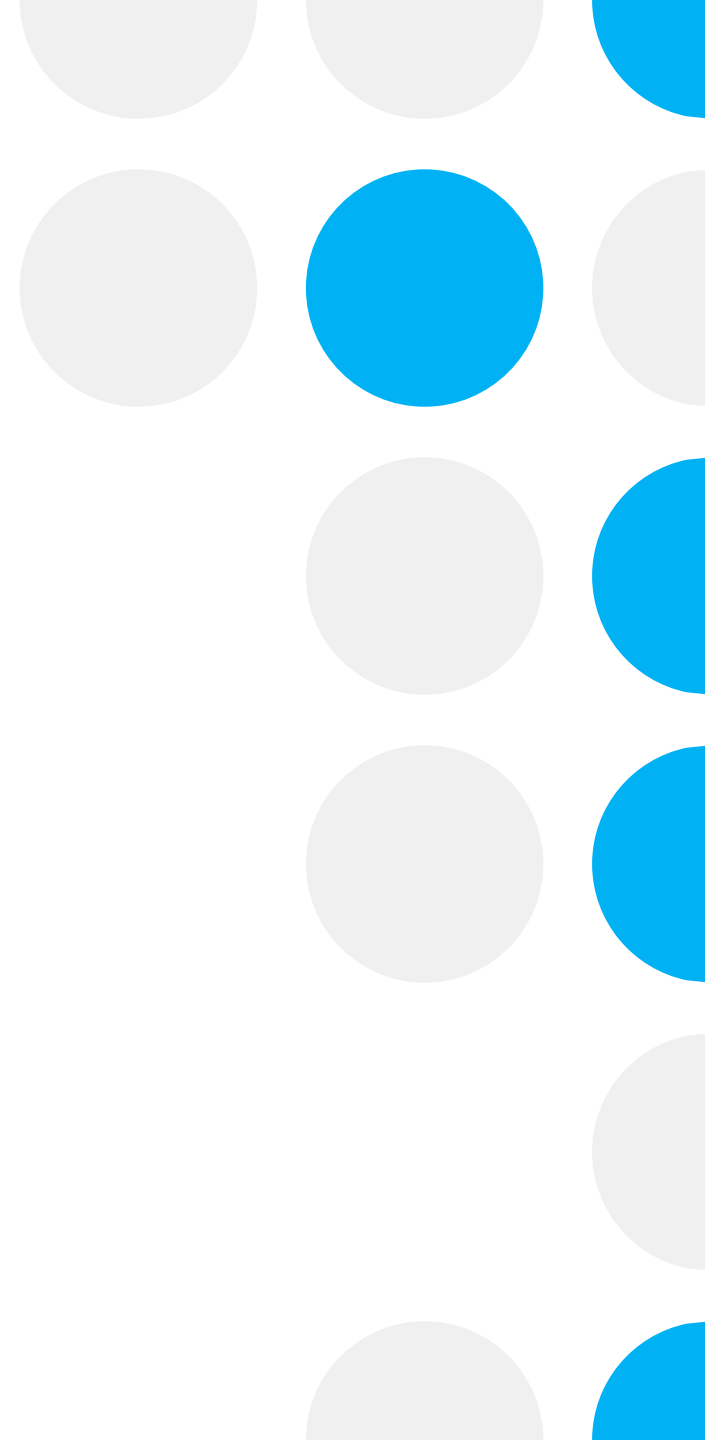
- Jorge A. Girotti, PhD, MHA, Associate Dean for Admissions and Special Curricular Programs, University of Illinois College of Medicine

[Source](#)

How much clinical experience is needed?

- If you volunteered/worked in a clinical position four hours per week over one year, this would be approximately 200 clinical hours.
 - Note that physician assistant programs often require 1000 or more patient care hours.
 - Working with a pre-health advisor can help you to properly balance the major components of a successful application: grades, standardized test scores (MCAT/DAT/etc), life experiences, other work and responsibilities, and of course clinical experience.
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A GUIDE TO COLD EMAILING



Examples of Cold Emails

Dear [Name],

My name is [Name] and I am a pre-PA student currently studying at [University]. I am searching for opportunities to expand my health care experience and find valuable mentors in the industry. I wanted to reach out to you because of your extensive experience working with Stanford's Physician Assistant program. I see that you have been working with Dr. Doctor at the Holistic Health Clinic and I have peers that have told me of the great experiences they've had while working with your clinic.

I want to be working as a physician assistant while mentoring students in the near future, so I wanted to reach out and to inquire if there is a position open for me to work with you and your clinic. I am open to getting on a quick call to introduce myself and share my CV with you as well.

I appreciate your time and please let me know if you are open to this.

Sincerely, [Name]

Dear [Name],

My name is [Name] and I am currently in my junior year studying chemistry at SF State. After graduation, I hope to attend dental school. I'm reaching out to you because of my interest in participating in your dental practice. I hope to be able to shadow you for a few hours, at your convenience. If you find me to be a good match, I would love to pursue continued volunteering or employment at your clinic.

I am dependable, friendly and a quick learner. I'll bring my very best to your clinic. You can reach me by email or phone/text (555-555-5555). Thank you so much for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you! I've attached a short resume of my educational and extracurricular experiences. Please let me know if there is any further information you'd like me to provide.

Sincerely,
[Name]

Dear [Name],

My name is [Name]. I'm currently a [student at XYZ or job title] and am working towards becoming a physician. I'm looking for clinical opportunities that will further expose me to the healthcare world and help me grow as a better future doctor. I found your contact information through the XYZ [hospital/clinic] website and saw that you specialize in XYZ. I have a special interest in XYZ because of XYZ reasons. In addition, I saw you have published work in the following areas XYZ and I am drawn to your publications because of XYZ.

I hope to be in your position one day and I wanted to ask if there are any job or volunteering opportunities at your clinic. I have past experiences in XYZ which I believe I can translate into a role in a clinical environment. Please let me know if you have any open opportunities or if you are willing to jump on a quick call to discuss your experiences as a clinician.

Wishing the best,

[Name]

Anatomy of a Cold Email

Dear Dentist,

My name is [Name] and I am currently in my junior year studying chemistry at SF State. After graduation, I hope to attend dental school. I'm reaching out to you because of my interest in participating in your dental practice. I hope to be able to shadow you for a few hours, at your convenience. If you find me to be a good match, I would love to pursue continued volunteering or employment at your clinic.

I am dependable, friendly and a quick learner. I'll bring my very best to your clinic. You can reach me by email or phone/text (555-555-5555). Thank you so much for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you! I've attached a short resume of my educational and extracurricular experiences. Please let me know if there is any further information you'd like me to provide.

Sincerely,
Name

← Personal info

← Clear request

← Your guarantee

← Be professional

Cold emailing and calling

- Try to strike the right balance of providing enough information about yourself without making it so long they choose not to read it
 - Have a clear request. You can start small. Asking to shadow a provider for an hour or two can blossom into a more permanent position after the provider has met you.
 - Anticipating (or even asking) what their concerns are will help you know how to ameliorate them.
 - Showing appreciation, even if they don't accept your request, helps to keep the door open for future opportunities.
 - Don't be discouraged by many rejections! It will often take many emails until you find that one person who is willing to help.
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**MAKE YOUR
EXPERIENCE
MEANINGFUL**



Keep a journal

- Use a notepad and pen
 - Avoid using your phone - it doesn't look good to have it out at the workplace. Prefer a small notepad and pen that you can keep in your pocket.
 - Ask the provider how and when you can write notes (for example, it is not appropriate to take notes in front of patients).
 - Take note of the objective and subjective parts of your observations.
 - Write down medical terminology, procedures, physical examinations, anatomy.
 - Most importantly, note your impressions of how providers interact with patients, how the provider advocates for the patients, what their thought process is when treating patients, the things that you cannot learn from a textbook.
 - Follow [HIPAA](#) guidelines and use common sense! Your notes must not be able to identify the patient. Always ask the provider for guidance and follow the rules.
 - Reflecting back on your notes will help when preparing writing your application and preparing for interviews
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Get to know your co-workers

- Be friendly at the workplace; bring a smile and positive energy.
 - Learn everyone's names and take interest in their interests.
 - These efforts will help you to build solid relationships. Your co-workers and supervisors will be more enthusiastic in providing support when you need it, offering opportunities for growth and added responsibility and serving as strong references in support of your goals.
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Show up on time and be dependable

- Being part of a clinic will allow you to make connections you may need for letters of recommendation or networking later down the road.
 - It is very important to put your best foot forward. Not just show up, but show up well.
 - Arrive on time and be dependable. Follow through with your commitments, be someone who others can rely on.
 - Importantly, pre-health students sometimes put too much on their plate. Be careful of this because if you put on too much, it may decrease your chances of being dependable. You don't need to be all over the place; one good clinical experience is as good as, if not better than, a multitude of less meaningful experiences.
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Q&A

