

## CaRMS TIPS FOR STUDENTS

# ACING THE INTERVIEW

### PREPARATION

Preparation is the key to a good interview - this tip-sheet will help you get ready to put your best foot forward. Review the tips and suggestions, then take time to practise your responses until you feel as ready as possible.

### ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

The interview is an opportunity for both the program and the applicant to discuss the intangibles that are difficult to put into written words.

Remember that the design of the medical education program promotes the acquisition of the technical knowledge and skills required to be a competent physician. Your transcript, NBME and OSCE scores all capture that information. Therefore, questions will mainly assess your transferable skills and competencies, as well as what motivated you to select your specialty of choice. Ultimately, the interview team is choosing future colleagues through this process.

The interview is your opportunity to showcase how well you:

- Work independently and with others
- Deal with difficult situations (both colleagues and patients)
- Communicate
- Solve problems
- Show initiative

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Listed below are questions typically asked at a CaRMS interview. Review the sample responses and practise answering each question in your own words.

#### Tell me about yourself

This is very often the first question and your answer will help set the stage for the remainder of the interview.

Provide them with three things you believe are important to who you are as a professional and what you will bring to the area of practice to which you are applying.

*Professional life - Related experience, volunteer work, research, education*

Avoid just listing experiences that are readily available on your CV. Try finding a theme or use an attribute to help structure your answer.

Examples:

- I am pleased to speak with you today. When I reflect on who I am, I think there are three things that will help you understand me as a person ...
- I have a passion for helping others, best represented through my involvement with... and my volunteer roles with ...



### Personal life - Activities outside of professional life

Try to make a connection between your hobbies and who you are. How have these helped you develop certain attributes which are essential to your specialty?

#### Examples:

- I grew up in a small rural town and believe in the strength of communities ...
- I play the violin, which provides me with an appreciation for the artistry of music ...

#### Suitability

Remember to focus on your audience. If a second language like French is really important in the geographic region you are being interviewed, and you have that to offer, make sure to emphasize that. If you have worked with a particular population relevant to the area of practice, mention that.

#### Why do you want to do \_\_\_\_\_?

Choose the top three reasons why you want to pursue the particular area of practice. One way to structure the answer is to use the "People/Place/Thing" approach.

#### Example:

I'm interested in Emergency Medicine because:

- **People** – age spectrum, in moments of great vulnerability and need
- **Place** – fast-paced bustle of the emergency department, team-driven
- **Thing** – wide scope of practice; everything from suturing a small laceration to opening a chest with a gunshot wound (GSW)

#### Tell us about a person you admire?

You do not need to talk about a healthcare professional for this answer, but be very clear why this person is admirable and how you might emulate this person's attitude, actions and attributes.

#### What are your strengths?

Consider providing three strengths in your first sentence. Then, provide an example for each. Summarize the three strengths and tie into how they fit with the program.

#### What are your weaknesses?

Unless they ask for two or three examples, provide only one. Choose a weakness that could be seen as positive, such as balance, time management, etc.

It is key to include how you are working on this weakness to minimize its impact. Show what you are doing now and what you will be doing ongoing to make sure it is not an issue.

#### Describe your strengths and your weaknesses

Sometimes the two questions are asked together. If this happens, list your strengths first, followed by a weakness. Then offer a brief summary of strengths at the end. If asked, be prepared to discuss more than one weakness. Try to frame the weakness in a positive way.

#### Comment on a gap in your CV

For explaining gaps in your CV, use the sandwich approach: state something positive, followed by a negative, then finish off with a positive.

#### Example:

I am a very dedicated person who believes in following through. During my second year of studies, a personal problem arose and I had to take some time off to deal with it. Once it was under control, I came back more dedicated than ever to complete my studies as I more clearly understood the impact of my education and training in my life.

#### Why should we choose you?

Review the selection criteria on the CaRMS website as well as the program's website for information. Pick two to three of their requirements and provide examples where you demonstrated these competencies.

#### Why did you choose our program?

Review what they offer and what they stand for – values, mission, organization goals, unique program accomplishments, etc. Then, make a connection with what you stand for, believe in, are interested in, admire about them and appreciate. Tell them how this will allow you to be a productive, contributing member of the medical team.

#### What are your goals?

Provide one or two goals that are related to the program, giving a brief explanation for each. Wrap it by restating them. Focus beyond residency for a longitudinal view.

**NOTE:** If they ask "what are your goals for residency?" then answer specific to residency alone. You can always extrapolate to how that will help you develop into a competent attending later on.

#### Think of an attending you aspire to be like. Describe him or her.

Identify an attending who has made a positive impact on you and describe the characteristics you most admire. Wrap it up by outlining how these attributes and positive factors tie in to your profession of choice.

#### Have you witness an attending engage in unethical or problematic behaviour?

Briefly describe the unethical/problematic behaviour; clearly label it. Then focus on why you deem it to be so. Be very careful not to identify or denigrate the physician.

#### How would you balance your work and life?

Provide two to three practises you have already implemented while in school or work that have allowed you to have a balance in your life. Explain how you will continue to maintain that balance based on what has worked for you.

#### What is your most important accomplishment?

Elaborate on an accomplishment that is relevant to the position, ensuring you make the linkages to the position.

#### What leadership roles have you held?

State leadership roles with a brief explanation focusing on what you learned from these roles that would be relevant and helpful to you in the program. Choose two to three and clearly outline how those experiences would be transferable to being a practicing physician.

#### Tell us about a time you were involved in a conflict:

Briefly describe the situation while being careful not to denigrate the individual. Then focus on what your reaction, outline your approach to communicate with the person(s), and how you resolved/attempted to resolve the conflict. Include a strong reflection including how you might handle it differently next time or how you might avoid creating this situation in the future.

#### Tell us about a time you made an error?

Pick a good example. It does not make you sound incompetent, in fact, the better the example the more authentic and insightful you sound. Lame examples show a lack of insight. Be sure to own up to the mistake and then Label and Learn. Label the error clearly; take ownership of your part in it. Clearly outline what you learned and how you will avoid a similar error in the future, or what you would do differently.

### **How well do you take criticism?**

Focus on a specific example, starting with a general statement. "Medical students are exposed to criticism, especially during electives." Proceed to tell them about the situation that brought forth the criticism, how you processed it in your mind, how you made the decision to move forward, what you learned from it and how this would be a benefit to you as you embark upon your area of practice.

### **Do you have any questions for us?**

This is a great opportunity for you to demonstrate your enthusiasm for the program. Always have a couple of questions ready:

#### **Examples:**

At the social evening, a resident was explaining a new program coming up about X; would you be able to elaborate on it?

I was reading on the website, about XYZ; it sounds like an interesting prospect. At what point in the residency program would a candidate be able to get involved?

Can you tell me about what I can expect about the on-boarding process and what supports are in place so that I can get up to speed as quickly as possible?

### **BEHAVIOURAL-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Behavioural questions are based on the premise that past behaviour influences future behaviour. However, this does not mean you will behave exactly the same way next time. Hence the requirement to reflect on the situation.

Ensure you use the "STAR" or "ELO" method to structure your answers:

**S** – Situation, **T** – Task, **A** – Action, **R** – Result/Reflection.

Your focus should be more on the A and the R.

**E** – Experience, **L** – Learning, **O** – Opportunity.

Your focus should be on the L and the O.

In a two to three minute answer the initial (S & T / E) should only take about 30 seconds.

### **GENERAL TIPS**

#### **First impressions matter**

Decide for yourself what impression and understanding you want your interviewers to walk away with. Remember that how you stand, sit, dress and greet the interviewers and individuals greeting you in the reception area. Be aware of hand gestures and use appropriately; avoid twiddling thumbs, stroking beards/moustaches, twirling hair.

#### **Consider your audience**

Ensure that you tailor your answers to the program and specialty to demonstrate your knowledge of the program.

#### **Build on your submission**

Add to your personal letter and CV through the stories you tell; do not regurgitate your letters.

#### **Be authentic**

Be yourself, smile, make and maintain comfortable eye contact. If you feel overwhelmed or nervous, admit to it.

#### **Choose your words well**

Avoid consistent repetition of "I think" and "um" or saying "That's a great question."

#### **Take your time**

Introduce brief pauses to make a point. Ask for a bit of time to think about your answers if required, but only do this a couple of times.

### **Ask for confirmation**

Check if you answered their question, but only a few times and only if you want to make sure you did not miss the point.

### **Do not lie!**

Do not say things about the program that are not true and that you cannot validate (i.e. "Program X has an excellent reputation nationally...").

### **Be confident - or at least appear confident**

View the TedTalk by Amy Cuddy "Your body language may shape who you are"

[https://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are?utm\\_campaign=tedsread&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_source=tedcomshare](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare)

### **POST-INTERVIEW**

Take time to reflect and record how you felt about that interview, the team and the program. This will help you when it comes to ranking. Write down the interview question and reflect on how you might answer them differently – this can help you prepare for your next interview.

### **CONTACT US**

We welcome feedback. Please let us know if you find this document helpful and if you have tips you would like us to add! Contact us at [studentaffairsmed@umanitoba.ca](mailto:studentaffairsmed@umanitoba.ca).

