

Guide: Get the Most out of Your Health Professions Shadowing

The key to shadowing is learning about, growing in, and more fully understanding your field of interest. Make the most of your shadowing experience!

STEP 1: Research and contact different health professionals in your field you want to shadow.

- Be kind, courteous, and most of all show some excitement towards learning and becoming a part of your health profession. Your passion and excitement will leave a lasting impression.
- Find potential opportunities to shadow by:
 - Contacting VCU Alumni: through www.vcualumni.org or via LinkedIn University pages
 - Searching Google: i.e. "Pharmacy listing, 23220"
 - Finding large and small hospitals, as well as private practice, community health centers, free clinics and hospice centers
 - Looking up insurance companies, ex: Aetna, Kaiser Permanente, Humana, etc.
- Contact organizations
 - Send an email, call directly or send a written letter (an example can be found at the end of this document)
 - Keep in mind that private or small practices, such as those involved dental, physical or occupational therapy, or veterinary, will probably be easiest to make and maintain contact due to their size. Hospitals and larger institutions may be busier and require multiple follow up contacts. Don't give up!
 - Confirm dates, times, length of shadowing if possible, and any other details before your first day arrival (check-in procedures, documentation needed, dress code etc.)

STEP 2: It's your first day shadowing! WHOOW! What to expect and what to do.

- Expect
 - To be standing around and watching everything the healthcare professional does.
 - To possibly feel awkward or out of place.
 - The health professional may ask the patient if they are okay with you observing and a patient may say no. Do not take it personally.
- Do
 - Ignore any awkwardness or feeling of being out of place while a procedure or consultation is happening. Everyone who has shadowed has been through it!
 - Consider it a rite of passage of sorts.
 - Greet everyone and smile. Address everyone formally unless told otherwise.
 - BRING SOMETHING SMALL TO TAKE NOTES ON! Pay attention to:
 - People to observe:
 - The health professional, other employees, patients and their families
 - Work environment factors to observe:
 - Workload and pace, team work and team cohesion, communication styles, attitude and work values
 - Work style factors to observe:
 - Skills required, procedures/interventions being performed, type and length of patient interaction, equipment used, and variety of tasks performed
 - ASK QUESTIONS.
 - Don't interrupt a procedure. Remember you're a guest.
 - Dress business casual, unless directed otherwise.
 - Women: Slacks, blouse or button shirt, blazer, heels or nice flats
 - Men: Slacks, button shirt, blazer, dress shoes

STEP 3: Day one is done. Figure out what you know and don't know about people who work in this profession. Do you know about their...

- Lifestyle
- Work schedule
- Reasons to do [a procure, process etc.] a certain way
- Patient interactions
- Skills required
- Office dynamics

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STEP 4: Further Shadowing. Show interest and ask questions to find out what you want to know.

- Some good questions are:
 - What do you like best and least about your job?
 - If you had to do it over would you consider the same career?
 - How do you to balance your family/personal life with this career?
 - How has the industry changed since you began working in it?
 - What is your advice on applying to, and choosing, a health professions school?
 - What are some trends you see in this profession?
 - How do you continue to grow your education or skills?

STEP 5: Reflect. The key to determining if this is the best career path for you!

- What did you like and dislike about the professional and job you were shadowing:

1 (Hated it!) – 5 (no opinion or don't know) – 10 (absolutely loved it!) = Circle one

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|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| ○ Work schedule | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| ○ Patient contact | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| ○ Stress level | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| ○ Responsibilities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| ○ Professionalism | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| ○ Environment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| ○ Variety/Routine | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

- Based on your experiences, what are your next step(s) to determining the best career path for you?
 - _____
 - _____

Sample Email

Dear Dr. _____,

I am a (**year in school, i.e. junior**) studying (**major**) at Virginia Commonwealth University. I have learned a lot from my academic experience and would now like to learn about (**health profession**) from the perspective of a health care professional. I am seeking a shadowing opportunity and hope you might allow me to observe your clinical interactions for a few hours on a day and time that works best for you. (*You can include the hours you are free here*). I have completed the HIPPA module on patient confidentiality and have an updated TB screening (*not always required but recommended*). In addition, I have copies of all of the forms that are necessary for shadowing at (**i.e. ABC hospital**). Attached you will find my resume in case you'd like to review my prior experiences and activities. Please let me know if you are able to accept a student shadow at this time.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Interested VCU Student