

CARLE ILLINOIS COLLEGE OF MEDICINE  
OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

# MEDICAL STUDENT SUPPORT

FROM PARTNERS, SIGNIFICANT OTHERS,  
AND FAMILY MEMBERS

*This guide was adapted from the University of New Mexico School of Medicine and Indiana University School of Medicine guide for families and loved ones to support their medical student.*

## DEAR FAMILY MEMBERS AND PARTNERS OF CARLE ILLINOIS STUDENTS:

Welcome to the Carle Illinois College of Medicine. Medical school will be a thrilling and rewarding time, as well as a time of tremendous growth. Your student may face challenges along the way that lead to questions about personal values, priorities, abilities, and career choice. An important part of your medical student's journey to becoming a physician is the support you can provide them along the way.

Our hope is that this guide will serve as a resource to you in supporting your medical student throughout their medical school experience from afar, living together, or anything in between.

If you have concerns about your student, please encourage them to reach out to one of the many sources of support available at Carle Illinois and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. But when in doubt, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at [teradani@illinois.edu](mailto:teradani@illinois.edu) or 217.244.6498. We are here to support the students and help them be successful in medical school.

Warm regards,  
**Danny Teraguchi, Ed.D.**  
*Associate Dean for Student Affairs*

## IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MEDICAL SCHOOL

Finding time to spend with your student can be challenging during medical school. Spending time together might be simply hanging out in the same room without distraction but creating a positive energy for your student to maintain focus and wellbeing. An important part of coordinating time together is communicating expectations. Additionally, finding a synergetic rhythm in medical school is key. Ways to establish this rhythm can include preparing healthy meals, assisting with domestic responsibilities (i.e., cleaning and laundry), and maximizing breaks. You may want to ask your student for copies of their curriculum and weekly schedule so you can identify periods of time that may require more intense studying or when you can plan an activity.

Another important aspect of communication is valuing the relationship that you have with your medical student. Identifying ways that you and your student can nurture your relationship and finding time to spend together to appreciate each other is important, even if it is just for an hour at breakfast or before bedtime.

It is important to identify and discuss milestones, such as anniversaries, birthdays, and other important dates, that are significant in your life and the relationship with your student. It is also important to understand that you may need to be flexible about when these milestones or events are celebrated. Communication with your student about plans for celebratory events in advance and even consider delaying celebrations until after an exam or other demanding curricular activities. It is important to discuss, at times, that medical school may take priority over relationships and being open to ways to support your medical student through tough days/weeks of medical school.

Most likely, there will be fewer visits home. While undergraduate students may have a few days off for a study break, in medical school, study breaks may only be a few hours. At times, even though the student wants to come home, demands on their time make it difficult to travel. This especially true if you don't live near Urbana-Champaign. However, here are some helpful ways to be supportive:

Invite them to events, but make it clear that it is okay if they are unable to attend in person. Emphasize

there are other ways to stay connected to their family/partner, such as you sending pictures or short videos, and arranging for virtual participation with tools such as FaceTime or Zoom during the event.

You may hear, "I have to study" or "I am busy." In these cases, allow your student the time they need. You may want to identify ways to maximize their study time by preparing meals, helping with laundry, or performing other tasks that free your student to focus on studying so that during their study breaks, however brief, they can engage with you or participate in a celebratory event.

Medical school schedules often change at the last minute and unexpectedly, which may mean your student will need to cancel or change personal plans with little notice. While this can be frustrating, it is important to try to be understanding and patient. A useful skill we teach medical students is to be agile and resilient with schedule changes by always having multiple backup plans (Plan B, C, D, E, etc.). You might also try this technique and have a "Plan B" ready to avoid or reduce disappointment if last minute changes to your student's schedule impact personal plans. This can be especially useful if you are living with your medical student and are faced with more frequent schedule changes than supportive family members who live farther away.

Whenever possible, discuss trips/travel planned to occur during scheduled breaks with your student well in advance. One of the challenges of planning trips is avoiding the weeks leading up to an exam. This is a good example of where a copy of the curriculum and detailed schedule can be useful. Medical school tends to have a series of exams with only a limited number of weeks between them. In addition, the third and fourth year of medical school have limited breaks and medical students often are in school all 12 months. When planning any trips, we encourage students to talk with the course director well in advance to understand the academic demands and impact if they are going to miss class or are not able to dedicate time for studying while on the family trip. Students working in groups or on group projects may want to coordinate schedules with their peers as well to ensure adequate coverage from teammates.

Medical school focuses on collaborative, team-based learning. However, most medical students found success in academics by being competitive and trying to get the highest academic marks. They will find that their classmates also come into medical school with similar success in academics. To create a supportive environment, we encourage students to help each other by sharing notes, study aids, and other resources. Perhaps, more importantly, we ask all medical students to seek help from faculty, mentors, and other administrators throughout medical school. Help-seeking behaviors are the hallmark of being an excellent physician. A successful physician quickly identifies when they do not know something, and then consults others for help and insight to jointly solve the issue at hand. It is important that you encourage your medical student to seek support early from classmates, faculty, and mentors. Your medical student may not be used to this kind of collaborative environment in which asking for help from other students or faculty is an expected professional behavior. This difficulty adjusting may include challenges to homelife and difficulty adjusting to the rhythm of medical school.

Instead of your medical student leaving town to visit family, a family member or partner might come to see the student. This can be challenging because your student may not have time to spend with visitors and the visit might cause distractions or unintended disruptions. Typically, after exams students have some breathing room for longer downtime. But remember, this may be hours rather than days. There is always more content to tackle, even after an exam. We encourage you to discuss with your medical student about optimal times for visits or find ways for others to be involved in the student's life in fun and inventive ways. Developing a plan with your medical student on ways to be supportive during intense study times and how to maximize breaks will be a very helpful, too.

Medical school is rigorous with massive amounts of information to learn and comprehend. There may be times your medical student is in information overload. During these times your medical student may not want to engage with you or answer routine questions like how things are going. We encourage you to learn what your student does for downtime to take a break from medical school content, such as watching a silly show or going for a short hike. Medical students have lots of exams. Although we foster a collaborative environment, test scores play a role not only in how students are doing in medical school, but also their future options for matching into a residency program. While asking how their exam went may not have been a stressful question as an undergraduate, this same question can be received very differently by a medical student. We encourage you to discuss the exam schedule with your student and how best to create a supportive environment for them leading up to and

after exams. Some students may want to rest, not talk about medical school content or reveal how the exam went whereas others may want to share a lot of detail. As referenced before, if your medical student seems distressed after an exam, it may be helpful for them to reach out to other supportive resources available to them.

Getting into medical school is a very competitive process. Everyone should celebrate the opportunity to pursue their dream of medical school. This also means medical school often has the best of the best students, who excelled with relative ease throughout their academic careers. Because of this, struggling may be a new concept to medical students. Your student may feel "average" but it is important to understand that "average" is a remarkable accomplishment in medical school. It is also important to understand that medicine is a team sport in which students work together, support each other, and pick each other up when they are struggling.

It is important to remind your medical student it is about the journey. Encourage your student to take advantage of the resources offered by Carle Illinois, to support each student's success, and remind them that being average doesn't define the amazing impact they will have as a physician. Your role as a partner, family member, or loved one is to inquire about the resources available to medical students and ensure that your student uses them to maximize their success in medical school.

Affordability of medical school can create a stressor for medical students. Unexpected living costs, expenses related to interviews or away rotations, and health expenses can add stress to an already stressful situation. It is important that you and your medical student discuss finances regularly and are aware of financial education resources at Carle Illinois and identify additional resources either by contacting Student Affairs or other mentors.

Getting to and from Champaign-Urbana to locations across the globe may take additional planning. The local airport, Willard Airport in Savoy, IL, has limited flights from American Airlines. Additional nearby airports include Bloomington, IL (45 minutes away), and Peoria, IL (90 minutes away). Midway and O'Hare airport in Chicago have the most flight options and are located 2.5 hours away. An affordable bus option is Peoria Charter: [peoriacharter.com](http://peoriacharter.com); Amtrak also services the Champaign-Urbana community. Another option is the Indianapolis airport, which is actually closer than Chicago. Some students have found less expensive flights out of the Indianapolis airport. Please note, however, that that Indianapolis is in the Eastern time zone, not Central.

## ALPHABET SOUP

Your student will essentially be learning a new language—the language of medical training and medicine. Here is a dictionary of some of the most common terms to help you better understand what your student is saying.

**UME:** Undergraduate Medical Education; refers to medical school.

**GME:** Graduate Medical Education; refers to years of training after medical school, including internship (the first year), residency (the remaining years of training in your student's specialty), and fellowship (optional subspecialty training after residency).

**Step 1:** The first part of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE). Taken at the end of Phase 1 of our curriculum (roughly in March of the second year), Step 1 assesses whether your student understands and can apply important concepts of the sciences basic to the practice of medicine.

**Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (Step 2 CK):** This part of the USMLE assesses a medical student's ability to apply medical knowledge, skills, and understanding of clinical science essential for the provision of patient care under supervision. This is a one-day exam divided into eight 60-minute blocks and administered in one 9-hour testing session.

**Step 2 Clinical Skills (Step 2 CS):** This part of USMLE exam uses standardized patients to test medical students on their ability to gather information from patients, perform physical examinations, and communicate their findings to patients and colleagues.

**EPAs:** This stands for [Entrustable Professional Activities \(EPAs\)](#), which are 13 activities that all medical students should be able to perform upon entering residency regardless of their future career specialty.

**Phase 1:** The Carle Illinois curriculum is divided into three phases. Phase 1 is roughly the first 18 months of the curriculum and includes preclinical coursework, Introduction to Clinical Practice, and the Family Medicine clerkship. This phase includes several structured breaks, so please explore with your student about optimizing these breaks for time together. The Step 1 exam is generally taken at the end of this phase.

**Phase 2:** In this phase, students begin their major clinical experience through clerkships. There are five

10-week blocks, which start in March and run through the following March. Different students will have different schedules. During this period, communication is key with your student as their schedule will have more variability depending on what clerkship they are on or elective or other educational opportunities they are participating. There are also fewer structured breaks during this phase. Step 2 exams are generally taken after completing Phase 2.

**Phase 3:** In this final phase of the Carle Illinois curriculum, students move an innovative IDEA project from concept to development through their capstone course; explore elective clinical rotations, which can be pursued at other institutions, both nationally and internationally; and, begin the application process for residency, submitting the initial paperwork in September. Generally, from October through January, students will be interviewing with residency programs across the country. In March each year, students are informed of their placement or match to a residency program. In addition to graduation, there is a final boot camp to support students' transition to residency.

**Shelf Exams:** These exams are National Board of Medical Examiners subject exams for different clerkships such as Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Neurology, Surgery and Internal Medicine. Your student may reference that they have a shelf exam coming up as they complete their clerkships.

**OSCE:** The Objective Structured Clinical Examination, or OSCE, is an assessment tool that tests clinical and communication skills. OSCE's are performed throughout all phases of the Carle Illinois curriculum.

**Clerkships:** Clinical experiences that are required for graduation and must be taught by Carle Illinois faculty.

**Electives:** Students may choose from a range of opportunities to fulfill graduate requirements that may be taken at various locations and institutions with approval.

**The Match:** This is the term for the National Resident Matching Program, an independent, non-profit organization that provides a systematic way of placing medical school students into residency positions in the United States. You will hear a lot more about the Match in the years to come.

**Match Week:** “The Match” generally takes place mid-March, starting on a Monday at 12:00 p.m. EST. Medical students receive either an email informing them that they have matched to a residency program, but not the specific location of the program, or they receive a message that they did not match.

Those that don't match will need to work with the Student Affairs office to participate in the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP). In SOAP, students may apply to unfilled residency program spots through a series of application cycles during the week. The week culminates on Friday with releasing where students match nationwide at 12:00 p.m. EST. Student Affairs organizes a celebration for the Friday Match Announcement.

**Medical Specialties Boot Camps:** In order to prepare medical students for certain medical specialties, such as surgery, residency programs have encouraged students to attend a boot camp to ensure they have the clinical knowledge and skills for entering a residency program.

**Transition to Residency Course—Career Boot Camp (required):** This Carle Illinois curricular requirement provides critical information and integrates as appropriate specialty boot camps for medical students.

**Residency:** This is the additional training stage in which graduates of the MD program begin their clinical education under supervision. The length of training under supervision varies depending on area of medicine, but can range from three to seven years.