

# ***Shadowing***

## ***What is shadowing?***

Shadowing is essentially observing a professional in their work environment. Shadowing consists of observing how a provider spends their day, how they interact and communicate with patients, and how a healthcare team works together. Shadowing can be done with a variety of health professionals in a variety of settings. It is important to note that shadowing does not mean that you will have patient interaction. The primary goal of shadowing is to learn from the provider, not provide care to a patient.

## ***Why do you need shadowing experience?***

While shadowing is not always required to gain entrance into a program, it is an important part of preparing for the health care field. Shadowing gives you the opportunity to explore what a typical day in a profession actually looks like. This is a good way to determine if you actually want to go into a specific career. This also gives you the opportunity to ask questions to an expert in their field.

Shadowing also shows dedication and interest in a profession which can help set you apart with admissions committees. It will give you valuable experience to lean on in interviews, personal statements, and other aspects of your application.

## ***What are the benefits of shadowing?***

Shadowing has numerous benefits, here are some of the most important ones:

- Create a better understanding of the profession in question
- Help narrow in on a specialty or population of interest
- Assist with program admissions
- Help you to prepare a skill set to become a better provider
- Get an immersive look into the requirements of an effective healthcare provider
- Demonstrates some of the benefits and drawbacks of the profession

## ***How to start pursuing shadowing opportunities:***

You should start shadowing professionals in your field of interest as soon as possible. This will help you determine if you are truly passionate about that career choice

The first step in shadowing is to identify the careers or specialty areas that you have interest in. This will help you figure out which providers to approach about shadowing opportunities, and help you find the area that speaks to you the most.

Next, find providers that you can shadow. You can begin this process by asking providers that you already know (like your doctor or physical therapist), or asking your network if they know of any providers that have let students shadow in the past. Your network can include professors, advisors, and other providers in the field.

Once you have found a provider that you want to shadow, reach out to them via phone, email, or written correspondence. Plan on contacting them a few weeks before you would like to begin shadowing. Make sure to let the provider know why you want to shadow them specifically, and how you came across their information. Also include your name, where you go to school, your goals, when you are available for contact and shadowing, and your contact information.

Your request to shadow does not have to be long, it just has to express interest and open up a channel of communication.

You can also expect some providers that you inquire with will say no. This is a normal part of the shadowing process, don't get discouraged! Some providers simply don't have the ability to have someone shadow them at the time you ask.

You should also plan on following up with providers, and sending out thank you messages as well.

### *Do's and Don'ts of shadowing:*

#### Do's:

- Dress professionally. If you are unsure of what to wear, ask your provider for a dress code
- Be on time: Punctuality is important in healthcare, and in shadowing as well. If you are late, providers may not let you shadow them any longer.
- Take notes: Shadowing is a learning experience! Write down the things that have an impact on you!
- Ask questions at appropriate times: Asking questions when shadowing can be tricky to navigate. Write down questions that you have so you don't forget throughout the day.
- Send thank you notes: Showing your appreciation is important, especially considering that the provider has invested a lot of time and energy into helping you.

#### Don'ts:

- Be discouraged if a patient doesn't want you in the room: Respect the patient's decision and privacy, and recognize it's probably not about you!
- Shadow solely for a letter of recommendation: Letters of recommendation are not always guaranteed, and you should truly want to engage with the provider, not just what they can give you.
- Disrespect members of the healthcare team or staff: The way that you treat others is important! Show everyone in the workplace respect.

### *Questions to ask providers you are shadowing*

- Why did you choose this profession?
- Why did you choose this specialty/population?
- What common problems do you deal with daily, weekly, yearly?
- How do you deal with difficult patients?
- What qualities make a good provider?
- Tell me about the best/worst day you've had on the job.

- How many schools/programs did you apply to?
- Are there things you wish you would have known before pursuing this profession?
- What does your schedule typically look like?
- Did you always want to be in this career?
- What do you do if you don't know something or how to treat a patient?
- Do you enjoy your job?

### *Other important notes*

There are other ways to gain experience that do not involve shadowing. These can be used in addition to, or as a temporary substitute for shadowing.

- Hospice Volunteer
- Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)
- Volunteer EMT
- Hospital Scribe
- Caretaker

In addition, look into virtual shadowing opportunities. This can be more flexible, while still helping you gain valuable insight and experience. However, not all institutions will accept virtual shadowing, so check with individual programs on whether or not it will be accepted.

Make sure to record your shadowing experiences. Include the provider, their specialty, the institution, hours, a description of the experience, and any notes/insights that you have as a result of your shadowing.

Shadowing takes time and commitment. However, the experience, insights, and connections that you will make are invaluable. It is absolutely worth all the hard work that you put in.

The ISU Career Center is a great place to go to for additional resources, information, and support concerning shadowing. Contact Sariah Millis: [millsari@isu.edu](mailto:millsari@isu.edu) or visit [isu.edu/career](http://isu.edu/career).