8 Reasons to Become a Primary-Care Physician

BY KAREN APPOLD
“I considered primary care early on because it offered the opportunity to provide continuity of care. Being able to see patients over the trajectory of their lifetime has significant advantages. Over time you develop relationships with patients and learn about their lives — such as details about their home environments, work life, and family life. Ultimately, knowing these specifics could help you to better diagnose and treat patients.”

Kelly Thibert, DO, MPH, national president, American Medical Student Association, Sterling, Va.
“Being a primary-care physician keeps me on my toes, which I thrive on. There is so much to know; it is virtually impossible to become an expert in every area. I am constantly exposed to new medical problems and learn new things. I can do as many procedures as I desire or refer patients to specialists. Because I enjoy performing procedures, I do all kinds of them from simple suturing and removing skin lesions to joint injections. While I currently do not perform vaginal deliveries and colposcopies, I could do them if the opportunity arose. I can care for an entire family from birth to death.

Kathryn Boling, MD, board-certified family medicine physician, Mercy Medical Center, Baltimore, Md.
“As a family medicine physician, every day is different. Each patient who walks through my door has their own story and medical mystery waiting to be solved. I love the challenge of dealing with the undifferentiated patient, using my clinical acumen and communication skills to understand what a patient is experiencing and to come up with a working diagnosis and plan for care together. The diversity of roles I play is extremely appealing; I can handle everything from pediatric to geriatric medicine, obstetric and newborn care, teaching, academics, administration, and policy making. There is little opportunity for monotony in this career path.”

Minoo D’Cruz, MD, family medicine resident, Memorial Hospital (Rhode Island), Brown University, Providence, R.I.
“There will always be sick people and there will always be healthy people; primary care is important for both. In many situations, primary-care physicians have the opportunity to be the first person to inform a patient about a life-altering diagnosis. This unique role is crucial to caring for the patient as a whole, not just treating the disease. A primary-care physician will likely serve as the central contact for a patient and all of their specialists. Additionally, many patient visits are purely for annual check-ups, counseling on healthy lifestyles, screening tests, or preventative measures such as vaccines. These visits allow doctors to promote personal and community health.”

Jonathan Katz, medical student, New York Institute of Technology, College of Osteopathic Medicine, Old Westbury, N.Y.
“Being a primary-care physician gives you the unique opportunity to improve patients’ lives through prevention. I have been instrumental in getting patients to stop smoking, stop drinking soda, improve their diet, and exercise more. These things will improve the quality of their lives. While practicing this kind of medicine may not come with the same kind of glory that an interventional cardiologist gets when he opens a clogged artery, it saves lives and improves the quality of life.”

Kathryn Boling, MD
“Primary-care providers are in the top 6 percent of earners in the United States, making it an economically viable profession that can provide both a comfortable lifestyle and rewarding profession. Based on economic analyses of the latest repayment options, it’s been shown that primary-care providers can pay off their loans in a timely manner without stretching their household monthly discretionary income.”

Richard Bruno, MD, resident physician, Combined Family and Preventive Medicine Program, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, Md.
“Family medicine offers a variety of practice experiences, including self-employment in a small practice, employment in a multi-specialty group, practicing under a locum tenens agreement, or being in a direct primary-care model. You can work in an inpatient or outpatient setting, deliver infants or focus on geriatrics. Family medicine offers the skills and training to create a practice tailored to your interests and needs at all stages of life.”

Marie-Elizabeth Ramas, MD, physician at Lamprey Health Center, Nashua, N.H.
“Family medicine allows you to be a system changer. Primary-care physicians are well positioned to offer expertise on how social determinants of health actually impact their patients. The nucleus of any community is the family. As family physicians, we have special insight on how interpersonal dynamics within families, race, lack of stable financial resources, and demographics directly affect quality of health and access to health for the families we serve. We have a unique and powerful testimony when sharing our stories with legislators.”

Marie-Elizabeth Ramas, MD