

Physician Statistics based on Allopathic (M.D.) and Osteopathic (D.O.) Education

Note: The following is directly quoted from a 2021 American Medical Association article.¹

In the U.S., there are two types of degrees in which physicians can practice medicine: an MD, a doctor of medicine, or a DO, a doctor of osteopathic medicine. The two degrees reflect different types of medical school training. MDs attend allopathic medical schools, while DOs attend osteopathic medical schools.

The Similarities

About one-quarter of U.S. medical students train at osteopathic medical schools. That number has grown significantly in recent years, with the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine reporting first year enrollment at osteopathic medical schools rising by more than 40% over the past decade. That spike is, at least, in part due to additional DO-granting medical schools opening.

In terms of the requirements to apply to MD and DO programs, the criteria are virtually the same, with both osteopathic and allopathic programs weighing grade-point average and Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) scores heavily. The curriculum is largely the same structure, with students in both types of programs typically spending much of their first 12-24 months in the classroom and the majority of their training beyond that in a clinical setting.

Single Accreditation, Residency Training

In the past, graduates from osteopathic and allopathic medical schools have generally matched with residency programs through separate processes.

In an effort to simplify the graduate medical education (GME) accreditation system in the United States, the organizations that accredit GME—the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education and the American Osteopathic Association (AOA)—have changed how they do things. The 2020 Main Residency Match marked the completion of the transition to a single accreditation system and the consolidation to one Match for U.S. DO and MD seniors.

Those changes also affect licensing. Most residency programs will accept the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination taken by DO graduates, as well as the United States Medical Licensure Exam which is taken by MD graduates and can be taken by DO graduates.

Mind, Body, Spirit

Historically, DO programs have touted their methods as more holistic. One aspect of that is the osteopathic manipulative treatment, defined by the AOA as a “set of hands-on techniques used by osteopathic physicians ... to diagnose, treat, and prevent illness or injury.”

Those skills typically mean that osteopathic medical students spend an additional 200-plus hours training on the musculoskeletal system in the curriculum.

“If a student is somebody who really enjoys that patient-centered approach and really is of the mindset that medicine is a mind-body-spirit relationship, a DO program will serve them well,” said John D. Schriener, PhD, associate dean for admissions and student affairs at Ohio University

Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, one of 37 member schools of the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium.

Most DOs Choose Primary Care

The 2021 Match, the second fully combined Match for DOs and MDs, yielded positive results for graduates from both types of schools. About 6,300 U.S. DO seniors submitted rank order lists of programs, and 89.1% of them matched. That percentage is a bit lower than the 92.8% Match percentage posted by graduates of U.S. MD-granting medical schools.¹

References

1. Murphy, B. (2021, Oct). DO vs. MD: How much does the medical school degree type matter? American Medical Association. Retrieved from: <https://www.ama-assn.org/residents-students/preparing-medical-school/do-vs-md-how-much-does-medical-school-degree-type>

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