

Osteopathic physicians (D.O.s) are licensed, as are allopathic physicians (M.D.s), to give complete medical care to their patients. Osteopathic physicians are trained in schools of osteopathic medicine where they complete the same basic course work as do allopathic physicians. In addition, they are taught to diagnose and relieve pain through the use of manipulative therapy, which is a hands-on technique based on the principles of osteopathic medicine.

## **HISTORY**

Osteopathic medicine was conceived by an American frontier doctor, Andrew Taylor Still, who recognized limitations in the medical care of his day and approached the treatment of his patients from the perspective that a person is the unified whole of all his or her components which interrelate inseparably in physical and psychological functions. He founded the first school of osteopathic medicine in Missouri in 1892, teaching students to focus on the patient, rather than on the disease. Osteopathic medical schools traditionally emphasize training primary care physicians. Some schools were explicitly founded to provide primary care practitioners to small towns and rural areas.

## **OSTEOPATHIC MANIPULATIVE TREATMENT**

Manipulative therapy is a hands-on technique that recognizes the role of the bones and muscles in disease processes. Osteopathic tradition holds the belief that strained or injured muscle groups contribute to illness in other parts of the body. In applying manipulative therapy, physicians use their fingertips to feel tissue beneath the skin for subtle changes that denote an abnormality in muscle tone. If these techniques are applied during a visit to the osteopathic physician, the patient may walk out of the office feeling much better than when he or she walked in. Often, less medication is needed and in some cases, the need for surgery is reduced. The osteopathic physician is trained to use all the tools available to a physician including prescriptive medicine and surgery. Musculoskeletal manipulation is an additional tool, which ranges in its use by D.O.s.

## **OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE TODAY**

About half of osteopathic physicians today serve in primary care areas (i.e., family medicine, general internal medicine and general pediatrics) while the rest practice other specialties. In recent years graduates of some D.O. programs have found their training identical to their M.D. counterparts and they favor the consolidation of osteopathic and allopathic medicine. The reasons for this sentiment are varied, but may include concern over the nature of training. Some take the view that osteopathic training programs in general are small, community-based and may lack pathologic and academic sufficiency. However, as D.O.s and M.D.s have come to know each other, physicians trained in osteopathic medicine have joined M.D.s in private group practices and in health care organizations like Scripps Clinic and Kaiser Permanente.

After completing osteopathic medical education, graduates may participate in either the American Osteopathic Association's residency match, or the National Residency Match Program. In recent years, while about half of the DO graduates have opted for general residencies, many others have also gone into specialty residencies.

## **PREPARATION**

Preparation for osteopathic medical school is similar in every way to allopathic medical school. The prerequisite course work is the same. Most schools report a mean science GPA for their entering class of 3.2 –3.4 with MCAT scores of 8 or 9 in each section. Osteopathic medical schools value a demonstrated commitment to public service, patient care experience and activities such as counseling, lifesaving, etc. See [Medicine](#) for detailed information on preparation for medical school, the application process and medical education. Applicants must also take the [Medical College Admission Test \(MCAT\)](#).

## **APPLICATION TO OSTEOPATHIC MEDICAL SCHOOL**

Application is made through the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS), a centralized on-line service through which applicants file a single set of official transcripts, MCAT scores and an electronic application which AACOMAS then verifies and distributes to each of the colleges designated by the applicant. The application cycle begins June 1 each year for entrance the following year.

Applications are obtainable from the AACOM via their site on the Web at <http://www.aacom.org>.

Osteopathic medical colleges require two or three letters of reference. Typically two of these must be from classroom science professors. It is also to the applicant's advantage to have a letter of reference from an osteopathic physician, and many schools require one. It is advisable to shadow an osteopathic physician in order to become acquainted with the practice of osteopathic medicine. The Health and Medical Professions Program offers a mentorship program which matches UCSD students with health professionals in San Diego.

### **OSTEOPATHIC MEDICAL COLLEGES**

To learn more about the osteopathic medical profession and education visit the **American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine** (AACOM) on the Web at <http://www.aacom.org>. This site provides detailed information on the 25 schools and three branch campuses of osteopathic medicine in the United States.

### **ADMISSION TO OSTEOPATHIC MEDICAL SCHOOLS**

In recent years UCSD has produced roughly 100 applicants to the nations' schools of osteopathic medicine, with about 50 being admitted each year. GPAs of accepted UCSD students tend to be lower than the national average, roughly 3.3 vs. 3.4, while MCAT scores are a little higher on average, around 25 vs. 24.

### **RESOURCES**

The **UCSD Career Services Center** offers the following services for all pre-professional students:

- ❑ Individual advising.
- ❑ Group information sessions on preparing for medical school, the application process and selecting schools, writing the personal statement, and interviewing for professional school.
- ❑ Professional and graduate school catalogs/brochures.
- ❑ Application essay (personal statement) critique.
- ❑ Informational handouts on topics including interviewing, application essays, tips on getting reference letters, the MCAT, etc.
- ❑ Panel presentations featuring medical professionals.
- ❑ The Graduate and Professional School Fair held each fall and the Health Professions School Fair held each spring featuring school representatives.

For a list of programs and events, pick up the [Career Services Quarterly Calendar](#) in Career Services or visit the website [career.ucsd.edu](http://career.ucsd.edu).

Western University of the Health Sciences offers periodic Open Houses at their College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific. This is a good way to explore this school and also to learn about osteopathic medical education in general, and some schools may expect applicants to take advantage of such opportunities.

UCSD's Health and [Medical Professions Preparation Program \(HMP3\)](#) offers a mentor program whereby students can be assigned to an osteopathic physician for shadowing and learning about the profession. In addition, the AOA website [www.osteopathic.org](http://www.osteopathic.org) maintains a list of local DOs through the San Diego Osteopathic Medical Association. Some local physicians are also affiliated with the San Diego Osteopathic Center for Children [www.osteopathiccenter.org](http://www.osteopathiccenter.org). Since osteopathic medical schools expect applicants to have exposure to osteopathic medicine, and often prefer a letter a recommendation from a DO, students should make good use of these local resources.