

Most people's experience with a doctor is limited to a 10 – 15 minute interaction, after a seemingly endless wait, at the office where their medical needs are addressed. In that short period of time, the physician must assess your complaints, come up with a diagnosis, and prescribe proper care. But what many don't know is what makes up a physician's day, and what goes into becoming a physician. Although the time spent in the office is minimal, the training that a physician must complete in order to practice medicine is extensive.

A typical day begins with morning rounds at the hospital, around 7am, where the physician sees his or her patients that have been admitted for various medical issues.

Time is spent talking to and examining patients, as well as following up with the medical team, comprised of resident physicians, medical students, and nurses, who provide round-the-clock care while a patient is "in house", the term for patients admitted to the hospital. Lab reports, x-rays, and studies need to be reviewed, in addition to speaking with various specialists who are involved with the patients' care. Depending on the number of patients, and their degree of illness, this can take anywhere from 1 to 3 hours. This is all done before the physician sees his first scheduled patient for the day.

After rounds, the next stop is either the office or the operating room.

In the office, a physician will see patients based upon his or her medical specialty. The most general specialty is primary care, which treats patients of all ages, from children to people in their advanced years, and covers all aspects of medicine. Patients are treated

for issues such as cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, or orthopedic disease, as well as for minor sprains, bruises, and tummy aches. More serious matters that need urgent attention are usually sent directly to the emergency room. Besides treating the above disorders, a physician also performs physical exams for school, sports, or employment.

The office visit itself is comprised of getting the patient's health history, performing the physical exam, which includes targeting the areas that are specifically affecting the patient, and formulating a diagnosis based upon the findings of the history and physical. All of this information is assembled into a care plan, which may include further testing, referral to another doctor or specialist, prescribing medications, or nothing at all.

Time in the office seeing patients takes up the majority of the day. But when the last patient leaves, the physician's work is not over. Follow-up phone calls need to be made to patients, insurance companies, and pharmacies, in addition to returning to the hospital for evening rounds. All in all, this makes for a day that can be 10 – 12 hours long, and can include weekends and holidays. Additionally, a physician may be required to “take call”, which means they must be available by pager, or physically present in the hospital, overnight.

Treating patients is not the only responsibility of a physician. Many physicians teach at academic medical centers, which includes teaching residents (doctors in training), medical students and nurses, as well as performing research, giving lectures and

participating on academic committees. These responsibilities are in addition to caring for patients in their private practice.

What does it take to be able to spend those 10 minutes with a patient in the office? A medical education is truly a lifelong process. A physician spends 4 years in medical school after college, and then completes a residency, which is training in a medical or surgical specialty. This additional training can be anywhere from 3 to 6 years in length. Afterwards, you can choose to subspecialize, which requires further training. Even after finishing formal training, a physician is required to complete continuing education courses on top of passing recertification exams in order to maintain a medical license.

Is it worth it? Careers in medicine have historically maintained high levels of job security, not to mention the pay is well above average for most specialties. Medicine is a challenging and dynamic field that is constantly changing, and extremely satisfying. The opportunity to be involved in patient care and to play a part in improving the lives of individuals, families, and the public at-large is tremendously rewarding. For those who choose the field of medicine, the training and the commitment required to spend those 10 minutes with a patient is definitely worth it.