

1. Family Medicine

First up is family medicine. Family medicine doctors are the center of primary care. They treat the broadest range of ailments and patients, from newborns to seniors and everything in between. They are not limited to a single organ, disease, or age range. Family medicine is consistently the least competitive medical specialty to pursue and has one of the lowest salaries at just over \$250K.

2. Internal Medicine

Next, internal medicine doctors are the generalists of generalists, treating a massive range of medical conditions, whether common or rare, complex or straightforward, acute or chronic. The biggest difference between internal and family medicine is IM doctors only treat adults. Internal medicine is also loaded with subspecialty and fellowship options, which we'll get to later.

3. Pediatrics

Next, we have pediatrics. Think of this specialty as the equivalent of internal medicine but for younger patients. Pediatricians care for babies, children, and adolescents from birth up to the age of 25. Pediatrics is another one of the least competitive specialties, in part due to its lower average compensation at \$250K a year.

4. OB/GYN

OB/GYN covers both obstetrics and gynecology. Obstetrics is the medical and surgical management of pregnancy, whereas gynecology is the medical and surgical management of the female reproductive tract. OB/GYN doctors see patients through puberty, adult life, pregnancy, menopause, and beyond.

5. Surgery

Surgery is a very broad medical specialty. Surgeons use manual techniques and medical instruments to physically reach into a patient's body to investigate or treat an illness or injury. The core specialty is general surgery, but there's a wide spectrum of surgical subspecialties, which we'll cover shortly.

6. Neurology

Neurologists specialize in the non-surgical management of a variety of central and peripheral nervous system disorders, managing everything from headaches and migraines to devastating and incurable diseases like ALS and Huntington's disease. Many diseases in neurology are chronic and progressive, but research and new therapies are rapidly evolving.

7. Psychiatry

Psychiatry focuses on understanding and treating mental health disorders and psychological distress through talk therapy and medication. They holistically consider the psychological, socioeconomic, and physiologic causes of their patients' symptoms, not just the symptoms themselves. Unlike psychologists, psychiatrists attend medical school and, up until residency, they complete the same medical training as all other MDs or DOs.

That covers the core rotations you'll encounter in medical school. You can learn more about each of them in our Clerkships Guide.

But we are far from done.

8. Plastic Surgery

You may have heard me mention this next one before. Plastic surgery focuses primarily on soft tissue, such as skin, muscle, and fat, to reshape or reconstruct a patient's appearance or function. Aesthetic plastic surgery involves procedures like breast augmentation and liposuction. Reconstructive plastic surgery involves procedures to correct facial and body abnormalities. Plastic surgery is consistently one of the most competitive specialties, in part because it has one of the highest average annual compensations at over \$600K. Learn more about the top 10 most competitive specialties.

9. Otolaryngology

Otolaryngology, also known as ENT, is a surgical subspecialty focusing on diseases of the head and neck region. This includes the vocal cords, nose, sinuses, ears, thyroid, and parathyroid, as well as head and neck cancers. ENT is also one of the most competitive specialties you can pursue.

10. Urology

Urologists are surgeons of the urogenital tract, which includes the kidneys, ureters, bladder, prostate, urethra, testes, and more. Urology can also cover sexual function, fertility, urinary continence, and gender identity.

11. Anesthesiology

Anesthesiologists are the patient's "guardian angel" during surgery, as they care for patients pre-op, intra-op, and post-op. They ensure patients are properly sedated and comfortable throughout the operation, maintaining stable vitals, blood circulation, and an open airway.

12. Radiology

Diagnostic radiology uses machines to visualize what is occurring inside the body. Radiologists interpret these images and leverage the power of machines to both diagnose and treat disease. While most diagnostic radiologists spend their time in reading rooms, interventional radiologists can perform several procedures, such as ablating cancers with radiation-infused particles.

13. Pathology

Similar to radiology, pathology is heavily intertwined with other fields of medicine and is considered a "support specialty." Pathologists primarily examine specimens to give tissue diagnoses and manage all of the clinical labs ordered by other physicians, from microbiology to hematology to chemistry and everything in between.

14. Emergency Medicine

Emergency medicine physicians treat patients with urgent healthcare needs, from acute conditions like heart attacks to exacerbations of chronic health conditions to stabilizing patients involved in trauma. EM doctors need to know a little bit about everything, making them the jack of all trades, master of one—emergencies.

15. Critical Care

Critical care physicians, also known as intensivists, treat patients with life-threatening injuries and illnesses in the ICU. While similar to emergency medicine, critical care focuses on the long-term, 24-hour care of a dangerously ill patient, as opposed to emergency medicine cases that require immediate evaluation and stabilization.

16. Preventive Medicine

Preventive medicine doctors apply their expertise in medicine, as well as the social, economic, and behavioral sciences, to show how changes to a patient's lifestyle can be an effective form of treatment and prevent illnesses before they occur. Preventive medicine physicians have one of the lowest annual salaries at around \$250K.

17. Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Physical medicine and rehabilitation, also known as a PM&R, is the jack-of-all-trades specialty focusing on the management of non-operative orthopedics and neuro-rehabilitation. Physiatrists are the primary physicians for certain nervous system or non-surgical orthopedic disorders, offering both medical and procedural treatments.

18. Orthopedics

Orthopedics, also known as orthopedic surgery, focuses on injuries and diseases of the body's musculoskeletal system, which includes a person's bones, joints, ligaments, tendons, muscles, and nerves. Orthopedic surgeons are one of the highest paid specialists, close to plastic surgeons at around \$575K a year.

19. Ophthalmology

Ophthalmology deals with ocular and orbital diseases, which is anything relating to the eyes and immediate surrounding structures.

20. Dermatology

Dermatologists manage diseases of the skin, hair, and nails using both medical and procedural aspects. A dermatologist can identify and treat more than 3000 conditions, including eczema, psoriasis, and skin cancer. A dermatologist's higher salary coupled with the better-than-average work/life balance it provides make it a highly competitive specialty.

The following 10 specialties are all technically subspecialties of internal medicine. We're releasing a video completely dedicated to internal medicine subspecialization options later this year.

21. Cardiology

Cardiology is the most competitive and highest paying of all of the internal medicine fellowships. Cardiologists treat diseases of the heart and vascular system, many of which are quite common, like heart failure, hypertension, and heart attacks. Heart disease is the leading cause of death among Americans.

22. Gastroenterology

Gastroenterology involves everything in the gastrointestinal tract, ranging from the mouth to internal organs like the liver and pancreas to the anus. They deal with a wide variety of diseases, including heartburn, inflammatory bowel disease, and hepatitis.

23. Pulmonology

Pulmonary medicine focuses on the respiratory system and diseases of the airway, lungs, and chest wall, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung cancer. Pulmonologists also manage patients who require mechanical ventilation and life support.

24. Hematology

Hematology and oncology are often lumped together because of how closely related they are. Hematology focuses on diseases of the blood, like anemias and clotting diseases, as well as cancers of the blood, like leukemia.

25. Oncology

Oncology focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of cancers, as well as the acute complications that can arise from cancer and its treatment.

26. Rheumatology

Rheumatology specializes in diseases of the joints, musculoskeletal system, and connective tissue. Rheumatologists see a wide variety of diseases, including autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and musculoskeletal diseases like osteoporosis.

27. Endocrinology

Endocrinology focuses on diseases of metabolism and the endocrine system, which is made up of the pancreas, thyroid gland, adrenal glands, hormones, and more. They commonly see diseases like diabetes, hyper and hypothyroidism, and obesity, as well as cancers related to the endocrine system.

28. Nephrology

Nephrology focuses solely on the kidneys, which are responsible for many vital and complex functions in the body, such as regulating our electrolytes and fluids. Nephrologists see a wide range of clinical diseases, including renal failure, acid-base disorders, and hypertension.

29. Infectious Diseases

The infectious disease specialty focuses on microorganisms that infect humans, including bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the importance of infectious disease specialists.

30. Allergy/Immunology

Allergy and immunology, often referred to as AI, is sometimes lumped together with infectious diseases. An allergist/immunologist cares for patients who have misbehaving immune systems, including people with allergies, respiratory diseases like asthma, immune deficiencies, and certain types of autoimmune conditions.

We're almost there. Lastly, we'll cover a few more subspecializations and other doctor paths.

31. Trauma Surgery

Trauma surgeons primarily deal with patients who have sustained a physical injury, often in an acute setting. The majority of injuries addressed by trauma surgery include those of the neck, chest, abdomen, and extremities.

32. Cardiothoracic Surgery

Cardiothoracic surgeons operate within the chest cavity. This includes surgery on structures such as the heart, aorta, lungs, mediastinum, esophagus, and diaphragm. Cardiothoracic surgeons do procedures like coronary artery bypass grafts to treat plaque buildup in heart vessels.

33. Vascular Surgery

Vascular surgeons manage veins and arteries in every part of the body except the brain and heart. They treat blocked carotid arteries in the neck as well as problems of the aorta after it leaves the heart and enters the abdomen.

34. Gender Surgery

Gender surgery is the controversial field of medicine concerned with alleviating gender dysphoria through surgical procedures. Any surgical procedure designed to help alleviate gender dysphoria can be considered gender surgery, including masculinization and feminization of the face and chest, tracheal shaves, voice modification, and even limb lengthening and shortening procedures.

35. Interventional Cardiology

An interventional cardiologist is a cardiologist who has completed additional training in minimally invasive procedures of the heart. Unlike surgery, these procedures are typically performed in a cardiac cath lab instead of an operating room and involve live x-rays, contrast dye, and specialized equipment.

36. Reproductive Endocrinology

Reproductive endocrinology and infertility, or REI, is focused on helping people get pregnant who are unable to do so on their own. REI physicians are experts in all things related to conception and reproduction and are adept at managing any issues that may be preventing patients from becoming pregnant.

37. Neonatology

Neonatology is a subspecialty of pediatrics that focuses on newborns. They are the ones called in when an infant is born prematurely or with an illness or abnormality that needs immediate treatment, such as infections, breathing disorders, and birth defects.

38. Pediatric Intensivist

Pediatric intensivists focus on the treatment of seriously ill patients from birth to 18 years of age and beyond. They perform intubations for children needing ventilatory support, place arterial catheters for children needing blood pressure monitoring, insert venous catheters for the safe delivery of certain medications, and more.

39. Podiatry

Podiatrists focus on the foot and ankle, as well as related structures of the leg, both in medical and surgical management. They use principles from sports medicine, biomechanics, wound healing, and various surgical techniques to treat anything from discomfort and pain to discoloration or odor.

40. Sports Medicine Doctor

Sports medicine doctors are non-surgical specialists who take care of musculoskeletal injuries for athletes and active patients. They address MSK issues similar to orthopedic surgeons but not requiring surgical intervention. They can provide a full spectrum of care for anyone who wants to be active.

41. Military Doctor

Military physicians must be specialists in their field while being competent and flexible generalists when deployed. For example, while deployed, a general surgeon may be asked to do cases more typically reserved for a neurosurgeon, otolaryngologist, or urologist.

42. Global Health Doctor

Global health doctors help spread medicine and surgery to developing countries and underserved populations. There are five billion people in the world who don't have access to safe and affordable surgical care. Global health aims to decrease this health gap by partnering with local physicians and advocates to empower those populations.

43. Neurosurgery

First up is neurosurgery, which deals with the surgical treatment of disorders that affect any part of the nervous system, such as the brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nervous system. It is an extremely difficult career path due to its competitiveness, long hours, and poor work-life balance. Note that neurosurgery can be further broken down into endovascular neurosurgery, pediatric neurosurgery, and more, but we'll save those for another video.

44. Orthopedic surgery

Next, orthopedic surgery deals with conditions involving the musculoskeletal system. Orthopedic surgeons use both surgical and nonsurgical means to treat musculoskeletal trauma, sports injuries, spine diseases, infections, tumors, degenerative diseases, and congenital disorders. Orthopedic surgery can also be broken down into further subspecialties, such as spine, foot and ankle, and more, but we'll save those for another video too.

45. Thoracic Surgery

Thoracic surgery involves the surgical treatment of organs inside the thoracic cavity, such as the heart, lungs, and other pleural or mediastinal structures.

46. Colorectal Surgery

Colorectal surgery focuses on the surgical treatment of disorders of the rectum, anus, and colon.

47. Endocrine Surgery

Endocrine surgery involves the surgical treatment of the endocrine glands, including the thyroid gland, the adrenal glands, the parathyroid glands, glands of the endocrine pancreas, and some neuroendocrine glands.

48. Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) Surgery

Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery, or HPB, focuses on the surgical treatment of benign and malignant diseases of the liver, biliary system, and pancreas. As the long but simple name suggests hepato stands for liver, pancreato stands for pancreas, and biliary stands for the biliary system.

49. Transplant Surgeon

Transplant surgery involves performing organ transplants, such as kidneys, lungs, hearts, and more.

50. Female Urologist

Female Urology is a subspecialty of urology. Female urology cares for the treatment of conditions like urinary incontinence, overactive bladder, and pelvic organ prolapse.

51. Pediatric Surgery

Pediatric surgery focuses on the surgery of fetuses, infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

52. Fetal Surgery

Fetal surgery focuses on fetuses specifically, which can include treating congenital abnormalities in fetuses who are still in the pregnant uterus.

53. Surgical Oncology

Surgical oncology involves the surgical management of tumors, especially cancerous tumors. This requires a general surgery background, as the focus is on surgical treatments.

54. Breast Oncology

Breast oncology is the treatment of breast cancer. It is classified as a surgical subspecialty for treatment that may involve the surgical removal of breast tumors, lymph nodes, or entire breasts, also known as mastectomies. Breast oncology does not cover reconstructive surgery, only any necessary removal.

55. Hair Transplant Surgeon

Hair transplant surgery focuses on restoring someone's hair by taking follicles from parts of the scalp where hair is growing and grafting it to areas that are thinning or bald.

Plastic Surgery has its own set of subspecialty fellowship options.

56. Microsurgery

Microsurgery focuses on operating on and repairing nerves, small blood vessels, and tubes using microscopic technology. Procedures include free tissue transfer, replantation, and nerve grafts or transplants. Microsurgery is the stuff of science fiction, as these physicians intricately move nerves and tissues using sophisticated microscopes for procedures like reanimating a face with Bell's Palsy.

57. Hand Surgery

Hand surgery is focused on the diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of hand injuries, such as carpal tunnel syndrome and degenerative and rheumatoid arthritis, as well as pathological disorders or trauma that affect the hand and wrist. Most of the time, hand surgery is a fellowship that follows orthopedics or plastics. However, occasionally, hand surgery follows general surgery. The orthopedics path focuses on the bones, while the plastics path focuses on the soft tissue, although neither does so exclusively.

58. Craniofacial Surgery

Craniofacial surgery involves the surgical correction of extreme facial deformities, facial clefts, and skull abnormalities.

59. Aesthetic Surgery

Aesthetic or cosmetic surgery is focused on improving a patient's appearance through elective procedures such as face lifts, breast augmentation, and liposuction. It's important to note a board-certified plastic surgeon will have thorough and complete training, whereas a board-certified "cosmetic surgeon" likely specialized in something unrelated and chose a cosmetic surgery certification after.

60. Breast Reconstruction

Breast Reconstruction Surgery is the surgical implanting, augmenting, and restructuring of the breast, most often due to cancer.

We're through surgery and on to pathology.

61. Forensic Pathology

Forensic pathology focuses on determining the cause and possible manner of death by examining a corpse through autopsies and postmortem examinations.

62. Genetic Pathology

Genetic pathology is dedicated to investigating the genomic basis of disease. Genetic pathologists improve health outcomes for patients by personalizing their medical care. They often deal with rare conditions and must answer complex medical questions.

63. Molecular Pathology

Molecular pathology focuses on the study and diagnosis of disease through the examination of molecules, including DNA, RNA, and proteins within organs, tissues, or bodily fluids.

64. Neuropathology

Neuropathology is dedicated to the study of diseases of nervous system tissue, typically through small surgical biopsies or whole-body autopsies.

Radiology is most commonly broken down into diagnostic or interventional radiology.

65. Diagnostic Radiology

Diagnostic radiology involves using a range of imaging procedures, like ultrasounds and X-rays, to obtain images of the inside of the body. The diagnostic radiologist then interprets these images to diagnose illness and injury.

66. Interventional Radiology

Interventional radiology is focused on diagnosing and treating illness with minimally-invasive procedures, such as inserting catheters or wires, guided by medical imaging technology like CTs, magnetic resonance imaging, or MRIs, and ultrasounds.

67. Nuclear Radiology

Nuclear radiology, sometimes called nuclear medicine radiology, involves using radioactive substances and techniques like scintigraphy to examine, diagnose, and treat patients with chronic or life-threatening conditions.

Next, let's look at the subspecialties of psychiatry.

68. Child Psychiatry

Child psychiatry focuses on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental disorders in children, adolescents, and their families.

69. Geriatric Psychiatry

Geriatric psychiatry is at the other end of the age spectrum. It is focused on the study, prevention, and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases, cognitive impairment, and mental disorders in the elderly.

70. Forensic Psychiatry

Forensic psychiatry deals with treating people with mental health problems who are in prison or a secure hospital. They assess the risk of harm to others as well as the patients themselves.

71. Addiction Psychiatry

Addiction psychiatry focuses on the evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of people who have one or more disorders related to addiction, such as drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, or food.

72. Military Psychiatry

Military psychiatry is dedicated to the treatment of military personnel and their family members suffering from mental disorders—both disorders that occur in civilian life as well as those caused by warfare and issues related to military life.

Lastly, here are some miscellaneous medical career paths that have not been covered yet.

73. Critical Care Medicine

Critical care doctors focus on the treatment and support of critically ill or critically injured patients. This often includes trauma victims and those who have multiple organ dysfunction.

74. Hospice and Palliative Medicine

Hospice and palliative care doctors treat patients who only have a short time left to live. They aim to prevent further discomfort and relieve suffering rather than search for solutions to cure a patient.

75. Geriatric Medicine

Geriatric medicine focuses on the unique medical needs of elderly patients, including long-term conditions and vulnerabilities, like risk of falls. This is a growing medical career path because of the increasing aging population in the US.

76. Medical Toxicology

Medical toxicologists deal with complications from exposure to drugs, chemicals, and biological and radiological agents. This can include chemical exposure, substance abuse, poisoning, drug reactions, overdoses, and industrial accidents.

77. Undersea and Hyperbaric Medicine

Undersea and hyperbaric medicine focuses on health concerns from exposure to environments with increased ambient pressure, such as in undersea diving or hyperbaric chamber exposure.

78. Radiation Oncology

Radiation oncology deals with the treatment of a number of different cancers by using high energy particles and waves, like X-rays, to shrink tumors and kill cancer cells.

79. Cancer Immunology

Cancer immunology is the science of using the body's immune response to combat various types of cancer. It is a rapidly growing field of research aimed at improving outcomes for certain kinds of cancer, such as kidney cancer and melanoma.

80. Longevity Medicine

Longevity medicine focuses on helping patients optimize their health and wellbeing as they age to achieve a greater healthspan—the number of healthy years you have left—rather than lifespan alone. They also help prevent or minimize the impact of age-related diseases. Longevity medicine is a new and emerging profession that's grown in popularity over recent years with the rise of medical and science celebrities like doctors David Sinclair, Peter Attia, and Andrew Huberman.

81. Preventive Medicine

Preventive medicine aims to prevent the occurrence of any health concern or disease. It's often practiced by primary care doctors who work directly with patients on prevention methods, such as improving diet, sleep quality, and stress levels, implementing adequate physical activity, and watching for early warning signs of health concerns through fitness monitoring, blood tests, and screenings. There's a lot of overlap between longevity and preventive medicine as they share similar goals.

82. Medical Scientist

Medical science is dedicated to conducting research that enhances our understanding of human health and diseases. Medical scientists explore the causes and progressions of various health conditions to develop effective treatments and preventive measures.

83. Sleep Medicine

Sleep medicine focuses on the study, diagnosis, and therapy of sleep disturbances and disorders, such as sleep apnea, narcolepsy, night terrors, and insomnia. This is another growing field of medicine, as more and more people are understanding the connection between our overall health and sleep quality.

84. Aerospace Medicine

Aerospace medicine, sometimes called flight medicine, focuses on the research, clinical care, and support of pilots, aircrews, and astronauts of air and space vehicles.