



AOCPMR American Osteopathic College
of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation

THE PATHWAY to PM&R

This document is intended to be a resource for anyone looking to become a Physiatrist and can be helpful to pre-med and current medical students of any year. If you have any other questions, feel free to contact the AOCPMR education and mentorship committees for further information

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First Year

Congratulations on being accepted to medical school and being one step closer to becoming a physician! Once you find a healthy rhythm with the demands of medical school, it's never too early to start looking and thinking about what you may want to specialize in and how to get there.

How do I know if PM&R is right for me?

- *Find a Mentor*
 - This is the first bullet point in this document for a reason! The medical school journey is all about learning from those ahead of you and paying it forward as you progress yourself.
 - Even if you are not sure if PM&R is right for you, mentors can help you with that decision as well!
 - You can be paired up with a mentor right here via the AOCPMR website:
<https://aocpmr.memberclicks.net/student-mentorship-program?servId=9718>

- Use your school and ask for upperclassmen who are interested in your field and see if they are willing to answer your questions.
- *Shadow*
 - Shadowing is likely the single best way to learn more about a specialty, so it's a great idea to shadow in fields you are interested in.
 - Be aware that you may not have a chance to rotate in PM&R until your fourth year and you may miss out on the opportunity for audition rotations if your first exposure to PM&R is later on in your fourth year - so get involved early!
 - There are many aspects of PM&R, so shadow in different settings: inpatient, outpatient, procedural clinics, EMG clinics, pediatrics, etc.
- *How should I go about shadowing?*
 - Reach out to your school club presidents to see if they have any connections.
 - It can be as simple as reaching out to local Physiatrists and asking if they would be willing to let you shadow. If you are having trouble finding a PM&R physician, try looking at local orthopedic groups, pain management groups and spine clinics. Many of these groups have PM&R doctors in their practices.
- *Podcasts*
 - The Undifferentiated Medical Student Podcast is an excellent resource for in depth reviews of many different fields in medicine.
 - For PM&R specific podcasts, try out some of these:
 - **AOCPMR Podcast**
 - PM&R Scholars Podcast
 - Simply PM&R Podcast (Mayo Clinic)
 - PM&R Pocket Mentor (AAP)
 - The PM&R Podcast
 - RehabCast
 - Any many more! -

How to Get Involved in the PM&R Community?

- *Volunteer*
 - Volunteering with disabled populations is viewed highly in the PM&R field and volunteering with the Special Olympics is the easiest way to do this. The Special Olympics has both local and state chapters for you to get involved with. Check out the link below for further information.
<https://www.specialolympics.org/get-involved/volunteer>
 - You can also sign up to participate at medical tents at numerous sporting events or races to gain experience working on musculoskeletal conditions.
 - Other organizations also have a directory of organizations that work with athletes with disabilities

- Most importantly, remember that there are no set rules on volunteering. Find something you're passionate about and volunteer with that organization.
- *Research*
 - Easiest way as a first or second year student may be to reach out to your mentors, upperclassman and faculty interested in your field to see if they are involved in research that you can join.
 - Whether you are on a medicine or PM&R rotation, always take the opportunity to get your name on a case report, abstract write-up, or presentation. They all are eligible to be put on your residency application and your curriculum vitae. Many of your peers in the osteopathic community have already made connections through AOCPMR or attendings so reach out and express interest!
 - Your school may have a list or website with each professors' area of interest, what current projects they are working on and if they are taking students.
 - Check out [PM&R Scholars](#) for research opportunities on Twitter!
- *Twitter*
 - Even if you are not interested in social media, there is invaluable information and networking opportunities to be found on Twitter.
 - We **highly recommend** creating a professional twitter account and start following leaders in the field.
 - You'll be surprised how available residents and practicing physicians are and you might even get some follows from program directors!
- *Leadership*
 - Schools have different clubs/organizations for all sorts of things so find and join something that interests you! Focus on quality over quantity. Don't worry about how many clubs or organizations you can join but rather work on obtaining meaningful leadership roles or projects that you can talk about and demonstrate your passion. Residency programs are interested in hearing about meaningful things and not a laundry list of halfway things you were involved with.
 - If physiatry is for you, join and become involved with your school's AOCPMR chapter. If you don't have one.... [Start one!](#)

Should I start studying for the medical licensing exams (USMLE/COMLEX)?

- *General*
 - Your mental health is your number one priority, so do not overwhelm yourself with board study if you feel you are struggling to balance what you already have going. If you are doing well, then a little board focused time is never a bad idea.
 - (See the "Which resources are good for studying for my licensing exams?" section further down for more information) to cross reference each medical school exam you take to see what's important board material.

- *Flashcards*
 - Premade Anki decks can be highly useful: <https://www.medschoolanki.com/>
 - Reddit has a very active group constantly improving and sharing public decks.
- *COMLEX vs USMLE*
 - COMLEX Level one is still scored but USMLE Step 1 is now Pass/Fail
 - This likely will result in greater emphasis on extracurriculars and STEP 2 scores when it comes to applying to former ACGME (MD) residencies as a D.O. student
 - Using a premade Anki deck as described above will prepare you for both - just add a COMLEX specific deck for the OMM topics.

Second Year

One year of medical school down and three more left to go! Hopefully you are starting to get the hang of how to study and succeed in medical school. Now it's time to really think about boards!

Tips to study for licensing exams

- First and foremost, everyone has an opinion on the best way to study for boards. You know yourself best. Don't worry about what other people are doing or how much they are doing. Tailor your studying program and resources to something that works for you! See the "Which resources are good for studying for my licensing exams?" section for some of the more popular resources.
- Repetition and memory hooks are key for board prep. A common strategy is watch corresponding Pathoma videos for pathology class as well as the corresponding Sketchy videos for pharm and micro (there are even pathology videos too).
- What may seem obvious during a specific unit can easily become forgotten without deep understanding and/or memory tools.

Should you take both USMLE and COMLEX for PM&R?

- This would be a great question for a mentor! (wink, wink)
- *Opinion #1*
 - Most schools will accept the COMLEX exams, however, there are some schools that require the USMLE Step exams as well. If you are on the fence between PM&R and another specialty, then it is best to just play it safe and take both exams. Some people who are hesitant if they will do well on both exams base their decision on a practice test they take just weeks before the actual exam. Although this will cost more, most will agree that you should not be cutting corners financially with such a big career decision. Furthermore, you must keep in mind that the status of ACGME and board exams are constantly changing. In this regard, it is best to just play it safe and take both exams.

- The common strategy is to take the COMLEX one week after you take the USMLE and use that week to cram all of the OMM material as that is the only real difference between the exams.
- *Opinion #2*
 - Depending on the programs that interest you, it may be beneficial to only take COMLEX exams. It is still a licensing exam so don't take it lightly.
 - In terms of which exam to take, it will be person-specific. If you feel your application is strong, then COMLEX may be the only test you will need to take. If you have any red flags or weak points in your application, taking both may benefit you. Best advice would be to talk to your mentors and residents who have come before you!

Which resources are good for studying for my licensing exams?

- It is imperative that you create a plan and stick to it. Manage your time and always make sure you are TAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF! Studying for the boards is like preparing for a marathon, not a race.
- Traditionally, most people use a combination of UWorld,) First Aid, Board & Beyond, Pathoma and Sketchy.
- If you are into Anki then the Cheesy Lightyear, Zanki, AnKing decks are highly reviewed. Do some searches on Reddit to see which one is best for you.
- Some people use Doctors in Training (DIT), Boards and Beyond, Kaplan resources, different podcasts and various question banks (Combank, Comquest, UWorld) to study for boards
- Savarese's OMT Review: A Comprehensive Review in Osteopathic Medicine is a good source for studying OMM for COMLEX. OMG OMT has also been popular to use for COMLEX as well.
- Another great question for mentors!

Third Year

Done with classroom based learning! Third year is a totally new type of learning experience. Finally, you get to see patients and be actively involved with their care. Below are some tips to succeed on the wards and plan ahead for a successful fourth year!

What skills are good to hone as you go through core rotations?

- Things you must know and be able to do especially on a PM&R rotation:
 - Comprehensive Neurology exam
 - Comprehensive Musculoskeletal exam
 - There are many special tests to know. This Youtube channel is what many of the residents use:
 - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_VQDInMfY5HoPn8w9OmuFw

- Another quality channel is the Stanford 25
<https://www.youtube.com/user/eozdalga/videos>

How do I get involved with research while on rotations?

- *Option #1*
 - Case studies are an easy way to get involved in research. Some schools may be looking for students to get involved in more intensive research. The next easy step up is retrospective studies that can often be done if you have access to an academic institution's patient database or an individual physician's patient database. These can be done on your own time and remotely which offers a perk during busy clinical rotations. These are also a good opportunity to showcase your analytical skills statistically and clinically.
- *Option #2*
 - Work with your rotation coordinators and see if you can schedule a short research rotation or two.

Consider attending a PM&R conference!

- Most, if not all, PM&R conferences will offer a student rate. This is a great way to get involved and become knowledgeable about leaders in the field. It is also your opportunity to network and get your name out there (even more so if you have a poster or case report). AOCPMR and AAPMR are both great places to start since there will always be programs or rehab hospitals with booths.
- Remember that PM&R is a vast field! There are a lot of different areas that a physiatrist can practice in so any conference pertaining to the musculoskeletal or nervous system would be a great alternative if you are unable to go to a PM&R conference.

What elective rotations are applicable to PM&R?

- First and foremost, do a PM&R elective if available. Other applicable rotations include: Neurology, Neurosurgery, Rheumatology, Sports Medicine, Orthopedics (preferably Spine), Anesthesia, Pain Management, Inpatient Medicine or Pediatrics. If possible, secure a Letter of Recommendation from any or all of these specialties as they can comment on applicable skills needed for PM&R.

How many PM&R rotations should I sign up for with VSAS?

- It never hurts to overreach and to maximize your options. You can always end up cancelling them if they don't fit your schedule as long as this is done appropriately. Most of the time these spots fill up anyways and you will not get accepted.

How long should my PM&R elective rotations be?

- Generally, you will be able to get enough exposure to a given program or subspecialty (for fourth year purposes) by spending two weeks at any given program. Two weeks is long enough to obtain a basic understanding of the subspecialty, earn a letter of recommendation, and get a feel of whether or not you like their program. Signing up for four weeks offers the benefit of added educational time, however, minimal benefit with regard to the other aspects. By rotating for only two weeks, you can get a better idea of more programs (which is often difficult to get a feel for during one interview dinner and a day of interviews and lunch at the program on an interview day).

Do I still have a shot at a residency program even though they don't offer audition positions to osteopathic students?

- Yes! For example at UVA, they do not offer PM&R elective rotations to fourth year medical students, however, they have accepted D.O.'s into their program. At the University of Colorado, it costs \$4,000 or more to rotate there as a fourth year medical student, however, they accept D.O.'s into their PM&R residency program (the increased cost comes from a decision higher up than the PM&R department).

Who should write my letters of recommendation and how many should I get?

- The gold standard number of letters of recommendation is three letters, however, historically it is not uncommon to be promised a letter of recommendation and that offer to fall through. This is a case when it is better to be safe than sorry. Letters can be uploaded to ERAS, and you may pick how many you want to "assign" to each individual program even if five attendings upload their letters of recommendation. It would be prudent to overshoot on the number of letters that you ask for if you have the option.
- It is best to get as many letters of recommendation as possible from psychiatrists. If possible, it carries a lot of weight to get this letter from a psychiatrist at a residency program, and even more weight the higher their position (e.g., chair or program director). However, you want to make sure that you have had a meaningful interaction with this person, so it is not advisable to reach out to the program director of the site that you are rotating at if you have only talked with them a few times, but have not interacted with them clinically.
- During this year students classically rotate on internal medicine which is a common preliminary year option among PM&R residents. Therefore, when applying to preliminary positions, it is helpful to have a letter of recommendation from an inpatient internal medicine physician. If you are not able to obtain this letter, it is good to get a letter from a non-PM&R physician to show your involvement in non-PM&R rotations.

Can I submit letters of recommendation after ERAS closes on September 15th?

- Yes, students often do this if they had a PM&R rotation close to or that went past September 15th in which their preceptor offered to write them a letter of recommendation. However, some program directors only upload all of the applications once, so do not wait too long. October 1st is when the MSPE's are universally uploaded into ERAS so many program directors will wait till then before downloading applications.
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Fourth Year

The light at the end of the tunnel! All your hard work over the last three years has finally paid off! Time to get ready for audition rotations, interview season and the Match!

What resources to use before audition rotations and beyond?

- Gold standard- [PMR Pocketpedia](#)
- ASIA exam modules: <http://asia-spinalinjury.org/learning/>
- [MSU PMR Student Handbook](#)
- Cuccurrillo Board Review - this is a good bullet point resource that covers all of the bases and is used to review for SAEs (Self Assessment Exams taken once a year in January as a resident) as well as board review book. Some attendings on rotations may ask you to look up as much as you can on a certain topic and a copy of this book is a good starting point.
- Manual of Traumatic Brain Injury Assessment and Management - This is a great resource for both a sub-I in TBI as well as studying for brain injury fellowship boards. It is succinct but provides a good resource for a month long rotations. Some say that even when studying for the fellowship in brain injury that this is better than "Brain Medicine" as that just goes into too much detail. Great resource for all levels.

What are the best questions to ask while on audition rotations/dinner with the residents about the program? What are the best ways to prepare for an interview?

- Make sure you do your homework and understand why that particular program interests you. From there, it is relatively easy to gather questions as you prepare for your interview. It is also helpful to research the people you may be interviewing with and come prepared to ask questions regarding their research interests or recent publications. It is always important to get the current resident's view on the program and how their training has been. You should get information on cost of living, best places to live, and ask if the residents do things outside of their program together.
- [Reddit Medical School](#) is also another great resource for all kinds of interview tips.

What considerations should I be looking at most seriously when considering how I make my rank list?

- Most importantly, you need to determine if the programs are a good fit for you. Regardless of the institution you train at, you will ultimately get your degree and graduate. It is imperative to choose a place you could see yourself at for many years to come. You should look at where past residents go and what types of jobs/fellowships they secure.
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Fellowships

PM&R gives you the opportunity to gain extra training in multiple subspecialties after completion of your PGY2-4 years. It is an exceptionally diverse field which allows you to complete both ACGME-accredited and non ACGME-accredited fellowships. Keep in mind that there is overlap between the two and some ACGME-accredited subspecialties fall under the non ACGME-accredited designation.

Some ACGME-accredited fellowships are:

- Brain Injury Medicine
- Neuromuscular Medicine
- Pain Medicine
- Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine
- Spinal Cord Injury Medicine
- Sports Medicine

Some non ACGME-accredited fellowships are:

- Sports and Spine
- Quality Improvement
- Cancer Rehabilitation
- Stroke
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Neurorehabilitation
- Electrodiagnostic medicine
- Occupational and Environmental medicine

Resources

- *Residency:*
 - A Step-by-Step Guide to Applying for a PM&R Residency:

- <https://www.aapmr.org/career-center/medical-student-resources/residency-programs/a-step-by-step-guide-to-applyingfor-a-pm-r-residency>
- *Fellowships:*
 - <https://www.aapmr.org/career-center/residents/fellowship-training-advice-resources>
- *Available Fellowships:*
 - <https://jobboard.aapmr.org/jobseekers/internships/>
- *Roadmap to Fellowships:*
 - <https://www.aapmr.org/docs/default-source/career-center/roadmap-to-a-fellowship.pdf?sfvrsn=0>