

Why Internal Medicine?

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A MD2B Publication

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30 Internists Offer Reasons Why They Chose the Specialty

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“Internal medicine is always challenging because there is so much information and knowledge we need to know in order to do our jobs. We look at a bunch of clues and try to make a diagnosis from the clues. It’s never boring, because every patient is different.”¹

James McCallum, MD

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“Internal medicine is the essence of medicine and the epitome of why one goes to medical school, with its emphasis on basic science, problem-solving aptitude, communication skills, and becoming someone’s doctor.”

Andrew R. Hoellein, MD

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“Many reasons are frequently cited for pursuing internal medicine as a career. Obviously, caring for adult patients is a cornerstone of the discipline. Most internists also state a love for the diagnostic process, the “detective work” that comes with analyzing a patient’s problems. Many physicians in internal medicine express a desire to be actively involved in the care of inpatients and outpatients. Some clearly want to follow patients over time, experience continuity, and make a lasting impact on their patients.”³

Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine

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“I chose internal medicine because it is challenging, dynamic, and fun. I enjoy shifting between caring for the sickest patients in the MICU to providing preventative general medicine for patients in continuity clinic.”⁴

Dr. Antonio Alvarado

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“I thought seriously about becoming a cardiac surgeon, as I love all things cardiac! But I realized soon that I wouldn’t have the relationships with my patients that I wanted. Before this, I considered pursuing a career as a basic scientist. Internal Medicine allows me to develop close, long lasting relationships with my patients. It is very gratifying to admit a patient, diagnose and manage them as an inpatient and then have them designate me as their PCP and follow-up with me in clinic once I discharge them to home.”⁵

Dr. Rashad Belin

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“As a physician, I want to see a variety of patients – men and women, young and old, rich and poor, and son on – and I want to treat a mix of medical conditions...On any given day, I may treat someone with a sinus infection in one room, and diagnose someone else with a rectal mass in the next.

While I enjoy working with a variety of patients, I also enjoy getting to know my patients over time. I wouldn’t be satisfied working in a specialty where I see a particular patient only once or twice, until the problem resolves, and never again.”⁶

Dr. Adam Possner

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“The very first clinical rotation I did as a third year student was internal medicine. I did it first because I had no interest in the field, and I thought it would be a way to improve my skills for the rotations I was more interested in, such as surgery. But then a funny thing happened; I fell in love with internal medicine. I really enjoyed the organ-based approach and the emphasis on pathophysiology. I think many students have little or no understanding of internal medicine until they are exposed to it in their clinical training.”⁷

William Hopkins, M.D.

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“I discovered that many of the internists that I encountered were the smartest, sharpest, friendliest and most compassionate doctors that I met in medical school and that made me realize that I wanted to pursue internal medicine as a career path.”⁸

Dr. Wayne Riley

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“I chose internal medicine for a variety of reasons. I feel that one of the distinguishing characteristics of internal medicine as a discipline is its breadth and versatility. Internists combine the attributes of a caring clinician, master diagnostician, expert in a variety of procedures, and medical consultant to other specialties. The scope of practice involves treating patients in the clinic, hospital ward, intensive care unit, in a hospice, and in a patient's own home or a nursing home. I enjoy seeing patients in these practice settings. The internist is the specialist who is often called in the hospital or clinic to aid in diagnosing complex adult patient presentations involving multiple organ systems. Internists provide advice regarding both wellness and disease. Long-term relationships with patients are also a core feature of practice that I likewise find very rewarding. Indeed, for me and many other internists, no two days are alike.”⁹

Dr. Steven Durning

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“I liked the diversity and having the skills to manage patients in the hospital and in the clinic. You deal with a different issue every day – it can be a social or a medicine issue in any number of organ systems. The diversity and variety are what drew me most to internal medicine.”¹⁰

Dr. Kevin Pho

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“What appealed to me was the problem solving that is involved in internal medicine. I really enjoyed that. I enjoyed the challenge of a medical problem and thinking it through and trying to find the diagnosis. I also enjoyed having more time to sit down with the patient and to hear their story...I felt like I had more time to empathize with the patient. I didn't get that sense in some of the other rotations that I did. Finally, I did outpatient work for three weeks with a cardiologist that was one of the most fun times of my life—I had such a blast. I really enjoyed his interactions with the patients.”¹¹

Dr. Ryan VanWoerkom

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“Internal medicine provides an incredible opportunity to build meaningful therapeutic relationships with adult patients over time. I love the idea of having the clinical knowledge to treat almost every patient who walks in the door. In addition, being the primary caregiver for patients and getting to work with them throughout the course of adulthood is an incredible privilege.”¹²

Dr. Jonathan Stegall

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“Students choose to specialize in internal medicine for several reasons. First and foremost, they are interested in caring for the acute and chronic illnesses seen in adults (over age 18). They are attracted to the intellectual challenge of providing comprehensive care to a patient and derive satisfaction from participating in the continuity care of their patients.”¹³

University of Maryland

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“I chose internal medicine because it has a good balance of chronic and acute health problems. I also like the degree of complexity in this specialty and forming long-term relationships with patients.”¹⁴

Dr. Safiya Karim

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“I choose internal medicine as a specialty as I found it to be one of the most rewarding- requiring an in-depth knowledge of general medicine to treat the patient as a whole. The opportunity to help and form long lasting relationships with our patients is the greatest reward that one can hope for.”¹⁵

Dr. Robert Smitherman

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“As a hospitalist, I am involved in providing comprehensive care of the patient rather than focusing solely on a specific body system like a specialist would do. Being a hospitalist allows me focus on patient symptoms, research, diagnose, and practice evidence-based medicine. As hospitalist I am also involved in the socio-economic aspects of a patient’s medical issues. I get great satisfaction out of taking care of patients and watching them recover from their illness.”¹⁶

Dr. Ajay Saini

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"I build relationships with patients that may last up to 30 years or more. This kind of long-term care of a patient offers a unique understanding of the person and the medical situation."¹⁷

Daniel Forward, M.D.

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“I find internal medicine rewarding and fulfilling because of the patients who have entrusted me to help them with their health care.”¹⁸

Timothy Jest, M.D.

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“One reason I like internal medicine so much is that I really enjoy all aspects of providing care, whether taking care of men, women or geriatric patients. As an internist, you never know what you are going to see. It’s always different every day, that’s what makes it fascinating...When something is wrong with somebody, I really like to understand the puzzle. To me, that’s really interesting. I like to take a history from a patient and figure out what’s really going on. For me, the critical thinking aspect of medicine is always fascinating.”¹⁹

Dr. Rebecca Kesman

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“Perhaps the most important reason was the career possibilities that internal medicine opened up—there is just so much one can do within the field. Training in internal medicine is integral and necessary to everything from the procedure-based practices, such as interventional cardiology, to rural primary care, to public health. Another important reason was that internists are both experts and generalists; they have varied practices and you’re never quite sure who will walk in the door next. Finally, internists get to participate in what I think are the most the most appealing aspects of medicine in general: great intellectual challenge and rewarding patient relationships.”²⁰

Dr. Robert Trowbridge

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“The spectrum of problems we see in Adult Medicine (Internal Medicine) is vast and the science of medicine is fascinating. An Internal Medicine physician must stay attuned to all the possible causes for a person's ailments and be able to direct the way to explain and hopefully cure them.”²¹

John Wittenberg, M.D.

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“The complex interaction of physiology, microbiology, genetics etc., to produce observable signs and symptoms of disease is still fascinating to me. It is a veritable goldmine of theory, connect-the-dots and lateral thinking. There is great beauty in diagnostic reasoning, and now with the influx of evidence based medicine one can truly apply oneself to understanding the scientific cause and effect of treatments. In a specialization like Internal Medicine the ‘art of medicine’ is still broadly emphasized – meaning intangibles such as being able to listen to your patients and to observe them for subtle clues of illness is still valued.”²²

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“I love being the first one to evaluate a medical problem.

I love using detective work and Occam's Razor to take a complicated story and develop a unified and cohesive diagnosis and treatment plan.

I love using all my senses to treat medical illness. To listen, to touch, to see...being a good internist takes

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all of them.

I love forming long standing relationships with my patients. Getting to know their children...and grandchildren...and sometimes great grandchildren.

I love catching a diagnosis that everyone else has missed.

I became an Internist because I felt it was the most rounded, challenging, intellectual prospect in all of medicine.”²³

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“I chose internal medicine because it seemed that when everyone else in the hospital got stuck or confused and didn’t know how to help a patient, they called an Internal medicine consult. They were the smartest doctors and could always figure it out. I also liked how the “art of medicine” for internal medicine meant the relationship you had with your patient, not making up what you thought might work because you were too lazy to look it up or your field had a paucity of evidence based medicine. I loved how internal medicine residents and attendings always taught you to look for the data to support what you were going to do. They were the ultimate lifelong learners and I knew I could never, ever get bored in this job.”²⁴

Dr. Amy Shaheen

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“I have a love affair with the physiology, pathophysiology, and pharmacology of the kidney, adrenals, heart, lungs, gut, liver, thyroid, pancreas, and gall bladder. Combine this with the responsibility to treat any medical problem, ethical issues such as end of life care, and being at the forefront of wisely using health care dollars — this is why I love internal medicine. It's a challenge. Everyday I leave the hospital with the simple satisfaction that I have done something to help another human being. There is no greater reward.”²⁵

Dr. Mike Wilson

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“I also loved science, the intricacies of the human body, and the ability to solve "puzzles" posed by human disease. My interest in biochemistry led me to spend several years engaged in basic and translational research, first as an undergraduate and then as an HHMI-NIH fellow. I saw internal medicine as the only way for me to combine all of my passions – community involvement, patient advocacy, health policy, research, and teaching. My mentors in medical school and the National Institutes of Health

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became role models who guided and encouraged me to pursue opportunities I never knew I had. Most of all, I saw internal medicine as an opportunity to treat the entire patient, not just the physical ailment that brought him/her in.”²⁶

Dr. Rozalina McCoy

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“I was attracted to internal medicine because it is a field in which one never stops learning. I loved the idea of being an old fashioned kind of doctor, you know, like the ones that could address almost any concern with as few tools as necessary. Understanding disease and how it manifests itself is the core of internal medicine and the opportunities are limitless to become a strong physician at Mayo Clinic. A life in internal medicine allows you to be on the front line of patient care and to be present during some of the most important times of someone's life.”²⁷

Dr. Sylvi Jaramillo

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“Being an internist allows you to be the quintessential physician. The internist has the broadest skill set of any type of doctor. To some degree, you can care for the entire spectrum of human ailments. Certainly we rely on specialists to help provide expert care in specific areas; however, we are the physicians who have the great responsibility and the great honor to coordinate the overall care of the patient.”²⁸

Dr. Mark Vogel

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“I enjoy the problem solving involved in diagnosing the hidden etiology of a patient's condition and the complexity involved in managing a patient's multiple medical conditions. I also appreciate the variety of conditions managed in Internal Medicine which makes every patient encounter exciting and does not lead to monotony.”²⁹

Dr. Chris Chong

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“When I was in medical school, I felt myself pulled in many directions. Surgery, ob-gyn, neurology, I enjoyed all of these specialties. As a matter of fact, I had requested my dean write letters for both neurology and ob-gyn because I could not make a decision. But as my training pursued, it became clear that internal medicine was the field for me. One, it treats adults and two; I was able to take care of

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patients in a variety of settings. Almost any patient that would come along, I would be able to provide care. So the internist has the opportunity to treat any patient regardless of what his problem is. In addition, there is a lot of thinking that goes into adult medicine, a lot of cerebral activity; I thought that this field fit me much better than any of the other fields. I enjoy science and the ability to think pathophysiologically, think about the patient's presentation, put them together and make a diagnosis and come up with a treatment plan and take ownership to help a patient through his illness, is what attracted me to this field."³⁰

Dr. Melvin Blanchard

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