

GENERAL SURGERY

Specialty Overview

General surgery is a surgical specialty dedicated to strong overall care of patients using surgery and other invasive procedures when indicated. The patient population taking care of by general surgeons are those with major trauma, surgical diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, surgical diseases of the liver, biliary tract and pancreas, surgical diseases of the endocrine system, surgical diseases of the breast, skin and soft tissues and those with chronic wounds. With or without further fellowship, surgery residents also get strong exposure and the capability to take care of people with minor thoracic diseases, esophageal issues, surgical vascular problems and very ill surgery patients in the intensive care unit.

How long is the training in this specialty?

General surgery training is five years after the completion of medical school.

Are there subspecialties? What are they?

General surgery can be a gateway to several specialties in two main categories.

1. After five years of general surgery, there are several fellowships open to those who graduate including:
 - A. Cardiothoracic surgery
 - B. Surgical critical care.
 - C. Transplant surgery
 - D. Pediatric surgery
 - E. Oncology surgery.
 - F. Hand surgery
 - G. Plastic surgery (two years)
2. In addition there are several unaccredited fellowships which are usually 1-2 years are available following general surgery training including breast surgery, advanced liver and biliary surgery, advanced laparoscopic surgery and bariatric surgery to name a few.
3. Partial general surgery trainings are often a part of other subspecialty including one year for urology, one year for ENT and three years for plastic surgery. These residents are met straight out of medical school but then spend the appropriate amount of time in the general surgery program before proceeding to their specialty.

How competitive is the specialty overall? The TTUHSC SOM program?

General surgery, like any of the surgery specialties, is very competitive. The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center program in Lubbock receives 600-900 applications yearly for three categorical positions.

What are the average Step 1 scores of successful applicants in this specialty?

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Does a first time Step 1 failure prevent students from matching in to this specialty?

Failure on Step 1 is difficult to overcome in a competitive field like surgery. If the applicant has subsequently taken Step 1 and done well and taken Step 2 with good scores, it will then prompt the review committee to look at their overall application carefully.

How important is it to have research experience?

Any extracurricular activity by the applicants will prove to the program director their dedication to achieving their goals and make their application stand out.

How important is involvement in student organizations?

This can be very important as it shows the program director their overall enthusiasm for their specialty, leadership skills and to make their application stand out.

What are the top regional programs in this specialty?

All of the surgery programs in Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico are considered excellent with a wide variety of program types ranging from academic to community based, large and small, each and every one with different emphasis, strength and weaknesses.

What are the top national programs in this specialty?

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In general, how many programs should students apply to?

The applicant should interview at at least 12 places to assure matching in this specialty. How many programs to apply to is based on the strength of the applicants and the likelihood of being offered an interview.

What are program directors looking for in applicants in this specialty?

Good standardized test scores, good performance in medical school, good letters of recommendation reflecting hard work, dedication to the specialty, good interpersonal communications skills and leadership abilities.

From which department(s) and what ranks of faculty should students request letters of recommendation?

All letters should come from surgery specialties with very few exceptions. Letters should be from the highest level within the education hierarchy including Program Director, Clerkship Director, or Chairman of Surgery, with at least one of the above and additional letters from surgical faculty who are very familiar with the applicant.

Are “audition electives” commonly required or strongly recommended by programs in this specialty?

These away electives are optional but can be very important if the applicant is specifically interested in a certain program. This can be an invaluable step to make them competitive for the program as long as their application looks good and they perform well during the rotation.

What can students do during their first, second and third years of medical school to prepare themselves for this specialty?

1. Excellent performance on standardized exams.
2. Get to know the surgeons within the institution by shadowing and/or doing research for.
3. Excellent performance on the clerkship.
4. Take on and complete projects that will enhance an application including research, leadership positions in student organizations and appropriate voluntary work.