

# Who Does What in Medicine?

*By Suzanne Brue*

The relationship between type and career choice has been studied more intensively in medicine than in any other occupation. Isabel Myers had a keen interest in the field of medicine and in helping medical students develop their potential, for their own sake and that of their patients. She used an early form of the Indicator in the relatively unknown Myers Longitudinal Medical Study\* of 5355 medical students from 45 medical schools.

These medical students were given the Indicator in the early 1950's by Isabel Myers and followed up twice afterwards in the 60's and the 70's by Myers and Mary McCaulley. The project was designed to see whether type could predict or explain individual differences in medical school selection, interests, aptitude, learning styles, specialty choice, and practice settings.

Recently researchers at the University of Connecticut and Louisiana State University\* updated this information with data on doctors graduating between 1983 and 1995. The findings of all these studies have been consistent, with a few exceptions mentioned at the end of this article. Here are some of the findings:

- All types are found in medicine, leading Myers to conclude that medicine has appeal for - and gains strength from - all psychological types. Although some aspect of medicine appeals to all types, there are increasingly fewer SPs than other temperaments. Since the 1950's the percentage of SPs in medicine has dropped from 22% to about 10%, perhaps reflecting the increased institutionalization and formalization of the medical world.
- A physician who changes specialties is far more likely to move into a specialty in which the doctor's type is more prevalent than in his or her initial choice. This supports a link between type and the medical environment in which doctors feel most satisfied.

## Choice of Specialty

- Medical specialties such as internal medicine and neurology attract more IN types, while surgical specialties attract ES types.
- Sensing types with their interest in high tech and straightforward approaches are more attracted to general and orthopedic surgery and obstetrics/gynecology.
- Intuitives' preference for complex problems and subtle nuances makes psychiatry attractive.

- ISTPs and ISFPs appear to be most attracted to monitoring jobs such as anesthesiology. Extraverted SPs were less comfortable with the extended attention span required by these specialties.
- INT types are attracted to pathology and research due to their ability to detach intellectually. They enjoy the challenge of medicine without ever seeing a patient.
- Pediatrics appeals most to the warmhearted ESFJs and ISFJs. ENFJs and INFJs, who enjoy nurturing intellectually rather than physically, choose more often to teach in medical school.
- Introverts and feeling types are more likely to choose primary care, with its nurturing role for the physician. Within primary care, feeling types are more likely to choose family medicine.

## **Medical Environment**

- Sensing types prefer a practice where they can use well-learned skills in a daily round of familiar activities.
- Intuitive types prefer to practice where they encounter complex diagnostic challenges or new breakthroughs.
- Thinking types prefer caring for patients where objectivity and toughness are required. This is particularly true for surgery where there is little continuity with patients over time and the decision-making process favors thinking.
- Feeling types prefer caring for patients where nurturing and compassion are primary requirements. In primary care, which attracts feeling types and introverts, there is a satisfying long-term relationship with patients and families and a service orientation.

## **Recent Study**

- The 1983 - 1995 study found the following changes in types reported by medical students.
- Judging types have increased. This may reflect increased reliance on technology and formal information rather than allowing the physician to scan the possibilities informally. The increase in judging types may also be related to the increased amount of bureaucracy, paperwork, and the systems used in large practices in medicine today.
- Women, who comprise 40% of medical students (compared to 6% in the 50's), tend to choose primary care specialties more often, and family medicine more often within primary care. This may reflect the greater proportion of feeling

types among women but also the attraction of fewer years in residency and the ability to devote time to their own families sooner.

\*Information on these studies can be obtained from librarian Jamie Johnson at the Center for Applications of Psychological Type (CAPT) at [johnson@capt.org](mailto:johnson@capt.org) or 1-800-777-CAPT.

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