

Mentor

Apprenticeship is a form of on-the-job [training](#) in which an individual, known as an apprentice, learns a trade or [profession](#) by working under the [guidance](#) and [supervision](#) of an [experienced](#) practitioner, often referred to as a [mentor](#) or [master](#).

As with any [profession](#), the best way for [learning](#) about [neurosurgery](#) is to talk to and observe practicing [neurosurgeons](#). For [students](#), this can sometimes be intimidating. A career in neurosurgery is a rigorous undertaking, and careful consideration should be given to one's motivation for choosing this specialty. Get to know neurosurgeons in active practice, and spend time with them and with [residents training](#) in neurosurgery. There are many different styles of practice, and a wide variety of personalities can be found in neurosurgery. To be certain that this career is right for you, it is wise to immerse yourself for a period of time. Spend several months on neurosurgery [service](#). Go to the [operating room](#) and the clinic as much as possible. Shadow a neurosurgeon to see what his or her life is like. Consider spending time in neurosurgery [laboratory](#) to understand the complexity and beauty of [neuroscience](#) and [research](#).

Neurosurgical MentorsSpend some time at a neurosurgery program other than that at your own institution. Talk to neurosurgery residents about their experiences with the [interview](#) process and how they ranked programs. Ask questions. Neurosurgery is one of the most demanding fields: Consider whether you would be happy in any other field of medicine. If the answer is yes, perhaps neurosurgery is not the specialty for you. Be certain that you have a clear understanding of why you have chosen this field.

By early in your fourth year, you should start actively looking for a [mentor](#) who will help guide you through the match process. This person is often the program director or [chair](#) of your department but can be any [neurosurgeon](#) who expresses interest in advising you through the match process. Make sure the surgeon you select is intimately involved in the resident [selection](#) process, as they are most likely to give good advice. Your mentor can help judge the strength of your application and suggest what programs you should apply to. It is especially important to have a good mentor if you think your application is not very strong – this person will give you the best assessment of whether it is worthwhile to go through with the process or help you create a backup plan. Towards the end of the match season, some mentors will be willing to make phone calls on your behalf to your first-choice residency.

You should avail yourself of as many sources of information as possible. Do not be afraid to seek information outside your home institution. This is your life, and you are about to make an important decision. The more informed you are, the better you will understand the demands and rewards of neurosurgery and how to succeed in becoming a neurosurgeon.

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