



## get on the medical provider path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if family physician is a good direction for you:

- 1 Do you want to help people by gaining an in-depth understanding of medical conditions, tests and treatments?  
 YES    NO
- 2 Can you handle stressful situations?  
 YES    NO
- 3 Are you a good communicator?  
 YES    NO
- 4 Do you like to problem solve?  
 YES    NO
- 5 Do you enjoy math and science?  
 YES    NO
- 6 Are you an independent worker?  
 YES    NO
- 7 Are you willing to commit about 11 years to education after high school?  
 YES    NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Family physicians are doctors who see a wide variety of patients, including infants, children and adults both young and old. They usually see the same patients on a regular basis, and often are the first person patients come to for care.

Family physicians examine, diagnose and provide treatment to patients, and educate them on how to maintain and improve their health. When needed, family physicians refer patients to health care specialists for testing or treatment.

In addition to family practice, physicians can specialize in many other areas, including pediatrics, cardiology, neurology, internal medicine, surgery, ears/nose/throat, and ophthalmology.

### What do family physicians do?

Family physicians have a variety of responsibilities, including:

- Interview patients to obtain their personal health history.
- Conduct physical exams.
- Perform and order diagnostic tests, such as lab work and X-rays.
- Analyze test results and make diagnoses.
- Review treatment options with patients and their families.
- Prescribe medications and treatments.
- Counsel family members about patients' conditions.

- Refer patients to health care specialists, when needed.
- Monitor patients' condition and progress. Revise treatment, as needed.
- Counsel patients on preventive health measures, such as diet and exercise.
- Coordinate activities of a health care team that can include nurses, behavioral counselors and others.
- Consult with other health care professionals.
- Keep accurate, detailed records on each patient.
- Write reports for insurance companies and government agencies.
- Take classes to update skills.
- May oversee the business aspects of running an office.
- May perform medical procedures, such as delivering babies and performing surgery.
- May teach at medical schools.
- May do research on procedures and treatments for disease.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, family physicians earn an average hourly wage of \$69.54, and have an average annual salary of \$144,650.

### How do I become a family physician? How long does it take?

To become a family physician, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Earn a bachelor's degree. Be sure to get high grades and take courses required for admission to medical school.
- Graduate from medical school and complete an internship.
- Pass a state licensing exam.
- Complete a residency program in family and general medicine.
- May pass additional exams to become board-certified.

All together, it takes approximately 11 years of education after high school to become a family physician. Earning a bachelor's degree takes approximately four years, medical school takes another four years, and residency programs usually last three years. Through WWAMI, Alaska's medical school, you can complete three of your four years of medical school right here in Alaska. Learn more about this program by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

### Attention high school students!

If you think you might want to become a family physician, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college preparatory or advanced placement (AP) courses. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- As many math and science classes as possible
- Anatomy and physiology
- Child development
- Computer applications
- Food and nutrition
- Introduction to health care
- Safety and first aid
- Accounting
- Entrepreneurship
- Introduction to business

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community. There are several opportunities offered through the WWAMI program at the University of Alaska Anchorage, including a six-week summer enrichment program.

### Are there jobs available?

In the coming years, there is going to be a huge demand for physicians in Alaska. According to the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force, Alaska will need to add more than 1,100 practicing physicians to the work force over the next 20 years – nearly double the 1,347 physicians currently practicing in the state.

### Where are the jobs?

Family physicians are found all across the state in communities of all sizes. They work in doctors' offices, clinics, hospitals, and federal, state and local government agencies. Additionally, about 12 percent of family physicians are self-employed.

### What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities on the medical provider career pathway? Be sure to read about community health aide and physician assistant – other health care "hot jobs" in Alaska!

