

## Neurology: Fascinating and Rewarding Career Choice 9/21/05

By Lisa Adkinson, Health Improvement Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati

It is estimated that one in six Americans is affected by a neurological disorder. These disorders affect the brain and nervous systems and include medical conditions such as Alzheimer's, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, strokes, autism and Parkinson's disease. When a neurological disorder is discovered or is suspected, a patient is most likely referred to a neurologist, a specialized physician who takes a history, performs a physical exam, conducts diagnostic tests and addresses the patient's questions and concerns.

Neurologists usually function as consultants to a patient's primary care physician. They may be called upon to make an initial diagnosis for a neurological disease and then provide ongoing care for chronic or recurrent conditions. However, for patients who do not have significant other medical conditions requiring non-neurological care, the neurologist may be the principal care physician as well.

But what does it take to be a neurologist? The minimum educational requirement for entry into a medical school is three years of college, but most applicants have at least a bachelor's degree. There are 146 medical schools in the United States, and they require applicants to submit school transcripts, scores from the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) and letters of recommendation. Students spend most of the first two years of medical school in laboratories and classrooms, and the last two years working with patients in hospitals and clinics under the supervision of experienced physicians. They gain experience in several areas through rotations or by spending concentrated time in specialties such as internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, psychiatry and surgery.

Following four years of medical school and one year as an intern,

neurologists enter a medical residency program that typically lasts three or four years during which the resident is working at the hospital or clinic seeing patients under the watchful eye of supervising physicians. There are 119 accredited neurology residency programs in the United States.

Nationally there are approximately 1,340 active neurology residents. During their specialized training, residents may treat patients to stop seizures, prevent or reduce the damage from strokes, improve the life of patients with Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, or Alzheimer's disease, all under the supervision of physicians. Approximately 38 percent of the neurology residents nationally are female and 62 percent are male.

The University of Cincinnati offers a four-year accredited program for neurology residents, which includes a first-year internship. Residents and interns are paid and provided benefits. The pay ranges from \$41,000 to \$45,000, depending on their year of training. There are four neurological residency slots each year at the University of Cincinnati.

Michael Privetera, MD, is a professor and vice chair of the neurology department at the University of Cincinnati. Dr. Privetera is also the director of the Cincinnati Epilepsy Center and the medical director for UC Physicians. He spends a lot of time researching new drugs and surgery for the treatment of epilepsy.

"Neurology is absolutely fascinating as a field," said Michael Privetera. "Every week we are learning something new about the brain and how it functions. Neurology requires a person who likes interpreting the latest research and applying it to patient care. For neurologists, translating research into treatment for patients is very rewarding because you are making a difference in their lives, and it is also a career that is always changing."

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