

# **Why Urology?**

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**A MD2B Publication**

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## 9 Reasons Why Medical Students Choose Urology as a Career

In a survey of approximately 250 urology applicants, researchers asked the question, “What caused you to pursue the specialty of urology?” The factors are listed below in descending order. The frequency of citation by urology applicants as a percentage is also presented.

**1** Mix of medicine and surgery / clinic and procedures (28%). One applicant wrote that he was drawn to the specialty because of “the wide range of office, surgical, and procedural techniques used in this field.” For another applicant, the availability of treatments that led to successful outcomes was particularly appealing. “The diagnosis and treatment of common problems that can actually be treated with a high degree of surgery with both surgery and medicine.”

**2** Diversity of urological procedures (26%). “Urology also has a wide variety of challenging cases, big and small, from stones to caval thrombectomies,” wrote one applicant.

**3** Prior clinical exposure to the field (25%)

**4** Interest in surgery (21%)

**5** Mentorship in urology (18%)

**6** Interest in urological disease or a urological subspecialty (17%). “During the first two years of medical school, I was fascinated by everything related to the genitourinary system,” wrote one applicant. “I found the anatomy, physiology, and pathology very intriguing.”

**7** Lifestyle and happiness of urologists (15%)

**8** Characteristics of urology patients (15%)

**9** Urology research (5%)

From Kerfoot B, Nabha K, Masser B, McCullough D. What makes a medical student avoid or enter a career in urology? Results of an international survey. *J Urol* 2005; 174 (5): 1953-7.

## 10 Reasons Why Urologists Entered the Specialty

In a survey of over 350 urologists, researchers sought to determine the factors that led urologists to enter the specialty as opposed to other surgical specialties. The factors are listed in descending order along with the percentage of respondents indicating the factor as being important.

- 1** Inspirational role models (38.3%)
- 2** Exposure to urology during training (32.5%)
- 3** Variety of open and endoscopic urological procedures (25.7%)
- 4** Quiet on-calls and sociable lifestyle (18.7%)
- 5** “Nice” personalities of urologists making them pleasant to work with
- 6** Diversity and range of conditions treated
- 7** Career opportunities and job availability
- 8** “Nice” patient population to whom urological procedures make a difference
- 9** Logical approach to diagnosis and investigations
- 10** Well-defined or “circumscribed” specialty

From Shah J, Manson J, Boyd J. Recruitment in urology: a national survey in the UK. *Ann R Coll Surg Engl* 2004; 86: 186-9.

# 20 Urologists Offer Reasons Why They Chose the Specialty

## 1

Urology is a challenging specialty that combines an exciting and diverse operative experience with an active office practice. In the operating room, the breadth of urology encompasses laparoscopic and open surgery, endoscopic procedures, and microsurgery. The patient population served by urology involves all age groups and all genders. Urology is at the forefront of a number of technologic advances in surgery ranging from new diagnostic techniques to innovative minimally invasive operative strategies. I have never met an unhappy urologist. This is a very rewarding discipline in which I can honestly say I have never met a urologist who was disappointed with his or her career choice. The patient population and the clinical problems encountered are diverse. Urology has a healthy mix of both surgery and medicine.<sup>1</sup>

University of Alberta

## 2

I pursued medicine for intellectual curiosity and believed it would strengthen my then career choice of bio-engineering. Through medicine, I could better understand how the body works. While studying medicine, I was drawn to surgery. I experienced urological surgery, and found it to be the most interesting surgical subspecialty. As a field, urological surgery is so diverse: simple to very complex surgeries; open to noninvasive and minimally-invasive procedures including the use of robotics.<sup>2</sup>

James Brown, MD

## 3

Urology is a surgical specialty. There is a wonderful variety; from major oncological cases which I enjoy, smaller stone cases using new and interesting technology, and also the ongoing patient interaction that makes the office work enjoyable. We are fortunate in this field to also deal with illnesses that are often curable and outcomes that are often very positive.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. William Meade

## 4

I choose urology for several reasons. Urology is one of the rare specialties of medicine that has a good balance of both in office medical patient care as well as surgical procedures. Urology is a field that generally requires the patients to be followed over a long term. This was appealing to me because I wanted to develop a relationship with my patients. Urology has a wide variety of surgical procedures. There are the simple in office cystoscopies and vasectomies to procedures in the operating room. The operating room has a wide variety of procedures including the traditional open procedures to laparoscopic and endoscopic procedures. I am a "hands on" type of person and therefore I wanted a variety of procedures. Another major reason of why I chose urology was the major need for women in urology. I was the 2nd woman to graduate from my urology residency program in 2001. Women in general prefer to see women physicians. I knew that there was a definite need for women in urology. Serving on the Board of Women in Urology I can tell you that more and more women are entering urology residencies and almost 1/3 of current urology residents are women. In the next 10 years there it will not be so unusual to see a woman urologist. The last reason I chose urology was because it still allows me to have a family and yet be a surgeon. There are few urological emergencies that cannot wait until the morning. This allows for more time at home with my family.<sup>4</sup>

Tracy Cannon-Smith, MD

## 5

I trained in general surgery, but there was a lot of life and death stuff, which was wrenching for me. Every time I lost a patient, I'd go to the bathroom and cry. It's a personality thing. This is the one thing that intrigued me. There were few women in urology, and I thought, "Why not?" I saw it as a challenge, and I was fortunate to have good role models, women who allowed me to see that it was a good field. I still like surgery; I like fixing things with my hands. It gives me a feeling of satisfaction to fix things. And urologists as a group are good-natured people. You must have a good sense of humor dealing with urology and gynecology.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Jenelle Foote

## 6

During medical school we rotated through many different specialties and I thought I wanted to go into surgery. I finished medical school and started my training in general surgery at UT Houston Medical School. In our first year of training, called our internship, we rotate through the surgical sub-specialties. For the first time I did a urology rotation. One of my senior residents was a chemical engineer before he went to medical school. He told me, "You are going to love urology- it's like chemical engineering- it deals with pumps, valves, filters and flow systems". He was right, urology just made sense. I switched from general surgery to training in urology, it was the best decision I have ever made. Urology is a great specialty because we have the opportunity to really help people. Because of the way the kidneys handle chemicals, we have tests that enable us to very specifically diagnose problems. We have other tests which help sort different types of bladder and prostate problems. With good tests, we can determine more specific treatment and the results of the treatment are much better. There is very little "exploratory" surgery in urology. We don't operate on all our patients. Some patients we help with medication. We also use physical therapy, biofeedback, radiation therapy and cryotherapy. The variety of treatment options keeps urology interesting and constantly expanding.<sup>6</sup>

James D. McAndrew, MD

## 7

I always wanted to study surgery and my original career was that of a general surgeon. As part of this I did quite a lot of urology and enjoyed it but it became apparent that urology would go off and become a specialty itself. So I left general surgery to become a urologist. There are immense technical advances in urology and things are moving forward quickly. I really do enjoy all aspects of urology, from ward work and outpatients to challenging operations.<sup>7</sup>

## 8

The ability to impact lives fuels Bingham's passion for urology. He first discovered he loved surgery during his training at Columbia University, where he learned how urology is uniquely compassionate. "Problems are often very personal, so people hesitate to see a urologist unless they really need help," he says. "Patients open up and quickly cut through superficial issues. That demands a high degree of trust, and those relationships are a special privilege."<sup>8</sup>

Jonathan Bingham, MD

## 9

I love being an urologist for many reasons, but what drew me to the specialty initially was the wide variety of what we may be called to do, both in clinic and in the operating room. We also see all types of patients including men and women, children and adults. The field of urology is constantly changing and improving and I enjoy the challenge of improving with it.<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Schlueter, MD, FACS

## 10

I fell in love with urology quite by accident. I was all set to do orthopedic surgery when I had a urology rotation as an elective. By the end of the first week, I had changed my mind. I like the variety. Urology is a good combination of medicine and surgery. Office-based procedures also provide variety throughout a clinic day. We see some pretty memorable things. One case that stands out is a woman we treated for incontinence. She said that the surgery we did changed her life. After the surgery, she had to exercise and lose more than 100 pounds. I literally didn't recognize her. She became teary and was very thankful that we were willing to operate on her, even though she was high-risk at the time. To be able to impact someone's life like that was an honor.<sup>10</sup>

Jennifer Maskel, MD

# 11

In my third year of medical school, during a urology rotation, I was moved and influenced by the quiet and unassuming Dr. David Uehling, an attending in pediatric urology. I found pediatric urology to be the most appealing choice because it combined surgery and pediatrics, the two specialties to which I was most attracted.<sup>10</sup>

Donald Nguyen, MD

# 12

I found that I just loved pediatric urologic surgery. I was very interested in fine reconstructive surgery, and I love children. I really feel I have the appropriate temperament that is well suited for this pediatric specialty.<sup>11</sup>

Earl Cheng, MD

# 13

I understand how challenging and difficult it can be for patients to seek care for urological problems. They want to be treated like people, not a medical code or a number on a chart. From the patient's perspective it's obviously a very personal, intimate matter to discuss such issues with a stranger. It takes a great deal of trust, and I repay that trust by acknowledging my patients' concerns, listening to their questions, and caring for them in a respectful manner," he added. "It's gratifying when I can see the change that a person, one of my patients, experiences when we have been able to resolve a problem that they may have had to endure for months or even years. Seeing the impact on people is very meaningful. That's why I went into medicine; that's why I love what I do," concluded Dr. Gricius.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Jonas Gricius

# 14

Pediatric Urology was a natural fit for me. Very early on, I recognized that working with children in medicine would be important for me. I had always had a strong desire to work with children and had taken positions as a camp counselor as a young adult to integrate that world into my life. In addition, my undergraduate degree was in mechanical engineering. Urology is a specialty that is very technology-oriented in terms of the instruments that we use and our interest in leveraging improvements in technology to provide surgeries that are minimally invasive. Although I left my undergraduate years knowing that a career solely working with mechanical devices alone would not fulfill me, urology was a field where I could bring the human aspect and my interest in technology together.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Chester Koh

# 15

It was in medical school that he became interested in his specialty, urology. Hedgepeth said he chose to research urology subjects because he knew many family members who suffered from kidney stones. As he worked with urologist Martin Resnick for a research project, he realized he'd found what he liked best. "It was during that process that he invited me to see a surgery. I saw a partial nephrectomy, and I was sold on the specialty," Hedgepeth said. "I am a visual spatial thinker, so surgery offers me a way to think and solve problems in three dimensions. Another thing that I love about urology is the immediate connection you have with patients, though it's still a surgical specialty that requires a high level of skill," he added.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Ryan Hedgepeth

# 16

In Urology, the patients we care for are generally well and there are usually direct answers to their problems. I like helping people get better. There is a lot of self-satisfaction in that. And I love surgery. I think it is something innate. I like working with my hands.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Thomas McNamara

# 17

I was drawn to urology because of the breadth of issues encountered, from the simple to the extremely complex, the purely medical to the purely surgical.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Brian Shaffer

# 18

For Dr Cathy K. Naughton, Assistant Professor of Urology at the Washington University School of Medicine, she credits her interest in urology to three factors: exposure to the field, process of elimination, and role models. "It takes one person to spark your interest in something," Naughton said. "Mentorship is key." Relating to the people in the field is just one of the many reasons to pursue a career in urology. The broad range of surgeries performed, the lifestyle, research and technology, specialization, and flexibility within urology are some other factors that make the field attractive. People going into surgical fields generally mention qualities like enjoying working with their hands and valuing team-work. Having a strong interest in surgery is one of the most important reasons to enter into urology.<sup>17</sup>



# 19

Why did I choose urology? It was more a case of urology chose me. As soon as I was exposed to its varied, dynamic and constantly evolving nature, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in a specialty ensuing maximal job satisfaction. It's a noble vocation, often dealing with sensitive patient issues. No two days are the same, and operating lists are wide and varied as are its on calls. It's a mentally and physically demanding specialty but one where you can really make a difference to peoples' lives.<sup>18</sup>

From *The Hands-on Guide to Surgical Training* by Matthew Stephenson

# 20

There was a lot of stone surgery that inspired my fascination with renal stones and with urology as a discipline. A patient would come in with excruciating pain and a big kidney stone, you would do a 40-minute operation, and the patient would pain-free. In addition, you could search for an explanation of why the kidney stone formed in the first place. You operated on patients with cancer who were not terminally ill. You saw patients with obstructive uropathy and who couldn't urinate and you could relieve them with endoscopic surgery. You also did diagnostic work.<sup>19</sup>

From *Life After Medical School: Thirty-two Doctors Describe How They Shaped Their Medical Careers* by Leonard Laster

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