Medicine
Changing lives

"I am the sort of person who loves having lots of options. Medicine combines science, public health, ethics, social science, and human biology - it’s so wide-ranging. You can combine your interests in everything you do."

Leehe Vardi
Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

Medicine is the general term used to describe what doctors (also known as physicians) do to assist you to care for your health and well-being. Medical doctors prevent, diagnose, treat, and cure illness, injury, and disease, and provide health care whenever required.

Doctors choose to work in one role or a combination of many roles including clinical medicine (patient care in general practice, surgery, psychiatry, paediatrics, and many more), medical research, teaching, and administration (in hospitals, medical schools, and government ministries).

There is no denying the hours worked by doctors are long and the need for continuing study is demanding. But the role of a doctor is rewarding and there is potential for great personal satisfaction.
What is medicine?

Medicine is a scientific, research, and evidence-based profession, which covers many areas of specialisation, including general practice, public health and hospital-based specialties, such as surgery, psychiatry, cardiology and many more.

If you are considering a career in medicine, you should be prepared for lifelong learning to maintain your practising standards. Society expects a high level of technical competence. Patients expect to be treated with patience, kindness and humanity. Ethical behaviour and rapport with people are necessary so patients can trust you with problems of their body and mind.

What will I study?

After selection from Health Sciences First Year (HSFY), or the Graduate or Alternative categories, you commence the second year of the six-year Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MB ChB).

Second- and third-year medicine offers an integrated course based on various body system modules and core clinical cases. The clinical cases run throughout the programme and act as a framework for learning, as well as bringing relevance to the underlying clinical and basic science.

Learning clinical skills and a focus on health in the community start at the beginning of the second year, and feature prominently through a variety of modalities including experimental practise (laboratories, clinical skills, talking with people), lectures, small group discussions and independent learning. After the third year, you will complete studies at one of Otago’s campuses in Dunedin, Christchurch or Wellington.

Fourth- and fifth-year medicine offer increased interaction with people and are centred around clinical work in hospital wards and outpatient clinics in teaching hospitals, in smaller rural practices, and general practices. You will also complete components of public health and community medicine.

Sixth-year medicine is an apprenticeship-style year, also known as the Trainee Intern (TI) year. You assume greater responsibility in hospital wards and general practices. This final year includes a three-month elective involving a project or clinical work, usually in another hospital or overseas.

There are research opportunities within the medical programme, including the option of taking one year off after the third or fifth year to complete a Bachelor of Medical Science with Honours (BMedSc(Hons)) degree. Some medical graduates choose to undertake further research and may enrol in a higher degree such as a combined MBChB/PhD. The medical school offers scholarships to many of the students who undertake the BMedSc(Hons) or combined MBChB/PhD degree.

Before you can practise as a doctor in New Zealand, you must register with the Medical Council of New Zealand and complete a one-year internship in a hospital. There are limited if any, New Zealand hospital places available for international students and an internship placement in a New Zealand hospital is not guaranteed for international students.

Background required

There are no subject requirements for entry into Health Sciences First Year, but we strongly recommend you take chemistry, physics and biology at Year 13. HSFY must be your first year of university study. If you are considering tertiary study before enrolling, you are strongly advised to contact the Health Sciences Admissions Office beforehand.

Admission to the programme

Admission to medicine is competitive, and there are only about 300 places available for New Zealand and international students. There are different categories of admission to medicine, but the majority of places are offered to students who have completed the HSFY programme at the University of Otago.

Selection into medicine from HSFY is very competitive. High grades are required and no compulsory paper grade can be less than a B.

Applications are also considered in the Graduate category and Alternative category (allied health professionals and mature graduates). Applicants may also apply via the Mirror on Society sub-categories, including Māori, Pacific, rural, low income and refugee categories, which are outlined in the Guidelines for Admission.

Want to know more about admission to medicine?

Application information for admission into the Health Sciences professional programmes from all categories is available online: otago.ac.nz/healthsciences

International applications

Persons who do not hold New Zealand citizenship or permanent residence should address their enquiries to the University’s International Office, PO Box 56, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand.

Leehe Vardi
Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (Registrar, Dunedin Hospital)

Leehe Vardi already knew she was going to become a doctor when she moved to New Zealand from Israel over ten years ago.

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Leehe chose to study at Otago for a number of reasons. Coming from a small community in Israel, Dunedin’s size appealed, as did the University’s integration with the daily life of the city.

So what was studying medicine at Otago like?

“It was a real experience!” Leehe says. “Fun, interesting, but never easy! Initially, I found integrating and being a mature student a challenge but the medical school gave me a lot of support.”

Leehe especially enjoyed the clinical experience in hospitals during her degree. “It gives you a window to your future,” she explains, “and allows you gradual contact with patients and the medical system.”

She also found learning about “complete biological systems” in second- and third-year anatomy exciting and enjoyed her visits to rural medical centres in Central Otago and the West Coast.

Now a registrar at Dunedin Hospital, Leehe thoroughly enjoys her interaction with patients on a daily basis and the opportunity they give her to “learn something new every day.” Leehe’s medical degree has allowed her to bring her life experience into her chosen career and taught her the importance of self-directed and continuous learning in a field that is endlessly evolving.

For questions about Medicine
otago.ac.nz/medicine