

MD-PhD
Dedicated Period
Survival Guide

When surveyed, previous MD-PhD students reported stress and isolation during Dedicated Period. We have compiled their stories, tips and suggestions to guide you through Dedicated Period and acing STEP 1. The results of the survey follow this guide.

Overall tips to succeed during STEP

- **Reach out to Mr. Gorske around the three-week mark during the Dedicated period to gauge your progress. Mr. Gorske is expecting each MD-PhD Scholar to do this.**
- **Contact your MD or MD-PhD Big 1 or 2 times during Dedicated Period, they have been through it and know what it is like.**

Suggestions to deal with the isolation during Dedicated Period:

- *Maintain study groups with other students (both MD and MD-PhD).*
- *Take time to go home and travel to study from friends' houses.*
- *Study with a study buddy.*

Common feelings during Dedicated Period:

- **It is common to feel more anxious during Dedicated Period, especially during the last two weeks.**
- **It is common that you have less confidence in your academic abilities during Dedicated Period than during medical school.**

Suggestions on Self-Care during Dedicated Period

- **Many used the freedom from classes and structured components to improve on their self-care in terms of diet and exercise during Dedicated Period as compared to medical school.**
- **Some use the extra time during Dedicated Period to improve the time with friends and loved ones, hobbies, etc.**
- **Some self-care resources:**
 - *HeadSpace is a good meditation app that helps with insomnia.*
 - *Spotify has podcasts such as "tracks to relax" which can help with insomnia*

Suggestions on helpful STEP preparation resources

- *Mock exams formally administered the by school.*
- *Anking deck*
- *Dropbox Resources*
- *Amboss*
- *UWorld*
- *Sketchy*
- *first aid*
- *The Free 120, which is a Step practice test online*

- *Anki deck for USMLE Step 1 high yield facts and Pathoma Anki*
- *UWorld flashcards, practice questions, and exams;*
- *USMLE practice tests*
- ***However, a scattershot approach where you use too many resources and don't go deep enough into any of them can be harmful. Pick one or two resources that work for you and use them.***

Big Takeaways:

- 1) Check in with Mr. Gorske at 3 weeks.**
- 2) Have planned social activities.**
- 3) Figure out how you study best,** and do that. Do not worry if it is not what other people necessarily do. If you need assistance figuring out how best to study, it may be helpful to schedule a meeting with Mr. Gorske, prior to dedicated to create your STEP 1 study schedule.
- 4) Plan to reach out to your MD or MD-PhD Big before studying, at 4 weeks, and at 6 weeks.**
- 5) Schedule time to spend with family and friends.**
- 6) Reassess early if things are not working AND REACH OUT FOR ASSISTANCE.**

SURVEY RESULTS

- **Did you meet with Dr. Dede during Dedicated Period?**

7 No's, 1 Yes

- **Who instigated the meeting?**

Me

- **How many times did you meet with Dr. Dede?**

Twice

- **How helpful were your interactions on a scale of 1 (not very helpful) to 10 (very helpful):**

10

- **Did you meet with Mr. Gorske during Dedicated Period?**

7 No's, 1 Yes

- **Who instigated the meeting?**

I reached out

- **How many times did you meet with Dr. Gorske?**

Once

- **How helpful were your interactions on a scale of 1 (not very helpful) to 10 (very helpful):**

5

- **Did you meet with your MD Big during Dedicated Period?**

5 No's, 3 Yes's

- **Who instigated the meeting?**

My MD Big reached out

I reached out

Both

- **How many times did you meet with your MD Big?**

1

2

- **How helpful were your interactions on a scale of 1 (not very helpful) to 10 (very helpful):**

9.7

8.3

- **Did you meet with your MD-PhD Big during Dedicated Period?**

SURVEY RESULTS

6 No's 2 Yes's

- **Who instigated the meeting?**

My MD-PhD Big reached out
I reached out

- **How many times did you meet with your MD-PhD Big?**

1
1

- **How helpful were your interactions on a scale of 1 (not very helpful) to 10 (very helpful):**

9.9
8.6

- **Did you meet with a member of the MD-PhD Directorate during Dedicated Period?**

7 No's 1 Yes

- **Who instigated the meeting?**

A member of the MD-PhD Directorate reached out

- **How many times did you meet with a member of the MD-PhD Directorate?**

1

- **How helpful were your interactions on a scale of 1 (not very helpful) to 10 (very helpful)**

10

- **Compared to your stress level during medical school, how was your stress level during Dedicated Period?**

5-Worse, 3-About the Same

- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

It was probably better overall, but the last two weeks before the test were so bad it kind of eclipsed anything earlier in med school.

The source of stress came from not knowing if I was making steady progress or not. During the preclinical portion of medical school, there are regular exams or quizzes

SURVEY RESULTS

to check your performance. During dedicated, it is a relatively long period of time without knowing whether you've hit a checkpoint or not. You just keep studying, with no clear metric of success.

I was more stressed at the beginning of dedicated. I had barely made the benchmark to take STEP, and my study buddy did not. We did not know about these benchmarks beforehand, which made the whole process more stressful.

The time autonomy of dedicated reduced by stress about time management. However, the pressure to perform well was higher than during didactics. I felt pressure to review materials when practice problems were my most effective study method. My stress was related primarily to the potential weight of the exam and my perfectionism.

- **Compared to your sense of isolation during medical school, how was your sense of isolation during Dedicated Period?**
4-Worse, 4 About the same
- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

Maintaining study groups with other students (both MD and MD-PhD) during dedicated were essential.

I was able to go home and travel to study from friends houses, which was awesome, but then as we got into the weeks leading up to it, everything was in Gainesville in their study hole and it was awful.

My sense of isolation was slightly worse during dedicated, but it was closer to "about the same" than "worse."

I studied next to my study buddy every single day which allowed me to not feel isolated. I believe if I did not have her by my side, I would feel much more isolated.

The collective stress in my peers made it challenging to find community. I found myself solo studying most of the time with occasional group study. My studying needs were dramatically different from my usual study group due to my learning disability. The heterogeneity of study needs in the disability community left me studying alone most of the time. I was also largely living alone during dedicated.

During the first half of dedicated I mainly studied at home by myself. I became very isolated because you do not have to go to the medical school regularly and see

SURVEY RESULTS

people. During the second half of dedicated I started studying next to friends and it helped immensely.

- **Compared to your anxiety level during medical school, how was your anxiety level during Dedicated Period?**

6 Worse, 2 About the Same

- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

For the last two weeks, I was having consistent anxiety related chest pain and insomnia.

Same reason for my stress increasing, as I was very anxious about not passing STEP.

During medical school you are busy doing and worrying about a ton of different things and there are a lot of distractions. During dedicated, you are primarily thinking about Step1 and how stressed you are. About half way through dedicated my anxiety got very bad and I started having physical symptoms which had never happened to me before and was scary. I went to Dr. Dede right away which was very helpful. I also started studying with my friends. I started box breathing which helped give me a sense of control. I began listening to my body and brain. If I needed a break, I took one.

- **Compared to your level of confidence in your academic abilities during medical school, how was your level of confidence in your academic abilities during Dedicated Period?**

4 Worse, 4 About the Same

- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

I did absolutely fine in medical school. I consistently scored above average on all of our written exams, but I really struggled to pass step. I only passed 1 of the 3 NBMEs I took in the 10 days before step and honestly would have delayed taking it, if the penalties for delay weren't so severe.

As I continuing to take practice test, my ability to pass improved which helped stabilize my confidence. I was not very confident in the first couple of weeks of dedicated though where it is hard to see progress.

I felt like I had forgotten a lot of material. I had started to compare myself to the performance of others. Multiple choice exams are an academic weakness for me. I was also concerned about long term information retention from medical school with the gap for PhD on the horizon.

SURVEY RESULTS

The strange thing was that I do not feel like I was incredibly stressed about passing. I was mainly just stressed about getting it done and feeling the anxiety and isolation of it all. Maybe that stemmed from a subconscious fear of failing? I am not sure. But I do not think it is uncommon for generalized anxiety to pop up or get worse even if you are not necessarily worried about your abilities.

- **Compared to your self-care in terms of diet during medical school, how would you judge your self-care during Dedicated Period?**

4-About the Same, 3-Better, 1-Worse

- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

Having the unstructured time made preparing healthy foods and exercising regularly easier

I started being able to cook more by setting a routine schedule.

Diet was unchanged. I continued to meal plan and keep a balanced diet.

- **Compared to your self-care in terms of exercise during medical school, how would you judge your self-care during Dedicated Period?**

4-About the Same, 3-Better, 1-Worse

- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

I went to the gym a lot during dedicated, and studied while on the treadmill. I also tried to walk around the room in between Anki cards.

My feelings of isolation and anxiety seemed to motivate me to exercise more. I may have had slightly more time for exercise as I was not traveling for classes.

I started punching a boxing bag. It was very helpful

- **Compared to your self-care in terms of participation in leisure activities (quality time with friends and loved ones, hobbies, etc.) during medical school, how would you judge your self-care during Dedicated Period?**

2-Better, 4-Worse, 2-About the Same

- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

SURVEY RESULTS

It was just really isolating for the last few weeks.

I would use evenings in the weekend to catch up with family and friends.

This period was very conflicting for me because I was in the middle of ending a long-term relationship which was emotionally stressful. However, I spent a decent amount of time with friends and family during this time.

I was able to make rest days for time in nature and with friends. However, my daily dose of human interaction was lower than during didactics.

I wish I would have done a better job of this. I think scheduled quality time is important.

- **Compared to your self-care in terms of participation in your utilization of support systems/therapy (observation of one's faith, therapy, meditation, receiving health care, etc.) during medical school, how would you judge your self-care during Dedicated Period?**

4-About the Same, 2-Better, 1-Worse

- **If you would like to elaborate, please do so:**

I certainly became deeper in my faith to help balance out the stress and anxiety I was feeling around dedicated.

- **Did you feel that your total self-care during Dedicated Period was sufficient?**

6-Yes, 2-No

- **What STEP preparation resources within the School of Medicine were helpful to you? Are there any School of Medicine resources you wish you had known about during Dedicated?**

Mock exams formally administered the by school. No resources I wish I had known about.

No, I honestly felt a little betrayed, because the format of the exams is so different. I unlike a lot of my classmates used solely UF Med resources to study during medical school and attended all the lectures in person etc, which certainly was helpful for med school exams but left me totally out to dry when it came to preparing for STEP. I felt like I was starting over almost from zero in terms of both style and content emphasized.

SURVEY RESULTS

I took the opportunity to take the practice STEP exam again, the one offered by the school of Medicine.

The dropbox of resources was certainly helpful, as well as the silent lounge that I used to study for dedicated.

Anking deck

Dropbox

- **What STEP preparation resources outside the School of Medicine were helpful to you? Are there any outside resources you wish you had known about during Dedicated?**

Amboss, uWorld, Sketchy, first aid. No resources I wish I had known about.

I mean U-World is kind of the whole thing. Used that with anki for things I missed. I honestly think a scattershot approach where you use too many resources and don't go deep enough into any of them can be harmful.

UWorld.

I took the Free 120 which is a Step practice test online. I also used the Anki deck for USMLE Step 1 high yield facts and Pathoma Anki. I wish I would have found out about these resources sooner.

UW flashcards, practice questions, and exams; USMLE practice tests

Amboss and UWorld were very helpful for step preparation. Exams released by the USMLE. Pathoma, boards and beyond, and sketchy for content review when I found myself struggling with a topic.

None

UWorld, Pathoma (esp Chapters 1-3 review the week before the exam), USMLE practice exams (do as if was the real thing and then add extra uworld block to make same length as real exam), Free120, Firstaid, Sketchy, Boards and Beyond

- **What self-care resources within the School of Medicine were helpful to you? Are there any School of Medicine resources you wish you had known about during Dedicated?**

SURVEY RESULTS

Not sure of any self-care resources within the medical school specially during dedicated.

None. I think people do like Dr. Dede, but honestly having easy access to a therapist not affiliated with the administration would make it a lot easier to trust them. I had tried sessions with her in the past and just could never trust her.

I didn't know about any self-care resources within the School of Medicine so it would have been great to receive this list beforehand.

None

Gym

Dr. Dede

- **What self-care resources outside the School of Medicine were helpful to you? Are there any outside resources you wish you had known about during Dedicated?**

vacation time built into dedicated studying schedule, significant other support, study group sessions over zoom. No resources I wish I had known.

I mean Headspace is a good meditation app that helps me with insomnia.

I enjoyed getting Boba with my study buddy after every practice exam. I wish I would have known about more wellness events in Gainesville.

*Personal exercise, quality time with friend and family
Actively in biweekly therapy, online yoga classes, and gardening.*

None

"Tracks to Relax" podcast and other podcasts to help with falling asleep and calming mind down at night, box breathing techniques, hanging with friends and family (who are and are not taking step)