How to interview for an MD-PhD position

When you apply for a possible future MD-PhD position, there are a few topics besides the actual research project that you should discuss with your potential PI. These questions and the respective answers will help you get a more comprehensive impression of the lab environment and can help you make a decision for one lab or another. The checklist below should give you an impression of the questions that you should ask during your interview – either by asking your potential PI directly or, if you visit the lab in person, by talking to various lab members.

This list should also help you find out what is important for you. Remember, an interview should be a discussion among equals, and you are expected to take this seriously and ask the questions that will help you make a decision. Do not be afraid to ask your potential PI probing questions.

Topics to be discussed with the lab head:

❏ After the interview you should have some clarity of what the first year of your PhD would look like and what tangible outcome you can expect.

❏ What is the expected/preferred level of interaction with your PI? You should attain a clear understanding on how this interaction would work.

❏ Since the MD-PhD program includes a considerable amount of course work, your prospective PI should be aware that this will have to be accommodated in your work.

❏ If you plan to do clinical work alongside your PhD (20% max), make sure to inform your prospective PI in advance and discuss how this will be organized.

Topics to be discussed with members of the lab (if possible):

❏ How and when to best contact your PI and other PIs (not only to report on successes, but in particular when difficulties arise).

❏ Level of guidance (regularly scheduled meetings with PI vs. on-demand).

❏ Lab organization: group meetings (how often and what is the format), journal clubs.

❏ Practical arrangements for arranging/approving vacation time.

Factors to consider besides the topic and lab atmosphere:

❏ Level of supervision you need/expect and how proactive you actually want to be.

❏ Big vs. small lab (and how that matches your preferred way of working).

❏ To which extent are you willing to develop your own project rather than taking on a fully predefined project?

❏ Responsibility and expectations regarding teaching and supervision of semester and master students.

❏ Approach to conference participation and how it will be funded.