Meet the Faces Behind the Mask

Join the Diverse World of Orthopaedic Surgery

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
Of the many careers in medicine to choose from, none offers greater possibility than orthopaedics. As our population grows increasingly diverse, today’s opportunities are especially relevant to women and minority candidates.

If you’re a medical student who is seriously considering an orthopaedic residency, this brochure will help you:

- Prepare for the residency selection process
- Gain valuable insight from distinguished orthopaedic surgeons who have navigated the path you now face
- Sharpen your understanding of the role a mentor can play in helping you reach your career goals
- Learn more about the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons’ commitment to bringing a new generation of physicians into our ranks

Get in touch with the Academy today.
mentor@aaos.org/800-626-6726
Getting on the right track

The steps you take early in medical school are vital to securing the residency program you want. Planning ahead can enhance your professional profile and your chances of obtaining an orthopaedic residency. Here are several suggestions to consider to help prepare for your future.

AAOS Mentoring Program

The importance of the support of a mentor cannot be overstated. Your mentor “can show you the ropes,” provide valuable exposure to the orthopaedic community, and give you a tremendous amount of information about orthopaedics in general.

The AAOS nationwide volunteer network of orthopaedic surgeons offers career guidance and uniquely personal advice to mentoring program participants. Though primarily designed for minority and female medical students, the AAOS Mentoring Program is open to any medical student interested in orthopaedics.

Networking

Make contacts and foster relationships. Attend orthopaedic conferences and weekly grand rounds. Ask questions. Communicate your interest. Become familiar with the environment and routine of the orthopaedic surgeon. You are laying the groundwork for your residency and your career in orthopaedics—so take the extra time to get to know people and to become known.

Research

While not mandatory, research experience is strongly recommended in today’s competitive environment. Any pertinent musculoskeletal research will add tangible experience to your record. Contact your medical school’s orthopaedics department to express your availability to work on summer or on-going research projects. Your mentor and medical school faculty are also strong resources for potential research experience. Let them know of your interest and willingness to volunteer.

The application

Begin the application process at the start of your fourth year of medical school. While each residency program sets its own deadline, most applications are due in October or November of your fourth year. Consider using the Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) to streamline the process. For a list of residency programs, or to obtain an electronic application, contact your dean’s office or visit the ERAS website at: www.aamc.org.eras

You now have the option to identify ethnicity and gender on your ERAS data sheet. This information is helpful to programs committed to diversity. Be sure to meet all deadlines, provide accurate information, and leave plenty of time as each application can take several weeks to complete.

Letters of recommendation

Selecting the right person to write your recommendation letter is critical. Remember, a persuasive letter is more likely to come from someone who has worked with you in the operating room, on research projects, or as a mentor during your medical training.

Finally, supply your references with complete and accurate information. Beyond your curriculum vitae, this should include pre-addressed mailing labels for each program you are applying to. With these elements in place, a trusted reference can present your talents, interest, and commitment to orthopaedics in a glowing letter of recommendation.
Meet some of the faces behind the mask

Claudia L. Thomas, MD
Assistant Professor, Johns Hopkins Medical School, Department of Orthopaedics
Baltimore, Maryland

Medical School: Johns Hopkins School of Medicine  Residency: Yale University

Career Highlights
First female African American orthopaedic surgeon in the United States.

What initially prompted your interest in orthopaedics?
“I was interested in surgery in general and was lucky to have the chance to do an orthopaedic rotation when I was in my third year of medical school. I said ‘I love this, but don’t see any women.’ I spoke to my chief resident about it and he said, ‘There’s no reason you can’t do this.’”

What advice would you offer minority and women medical students seriously considering orthopaedics?
“It’s a wonderful career. The primary attribute you should have as an orthopaedic surgeon is the ability and the desire to take care of people and make them better.”

In leading by example, what are your hopes?
“To make sure that although I am the first African American woman in orthopaedic surgery, that I will not be the last.”
Medical School: Pennsylvania State University  
Residency: University of Michigan

**Career Highlights**
Enhancing the lives of people with disabilities.

**How would you characterize the mentors who have guided you?**
“Always very encouraging and positive. When I was a student, for the 4th year rotation, my mentor sent me to spend some time with a woman orthopaedist—someone he had trained with when he was a resident. He wanted me to see this was something I could do.”

**What personal attributes help candidates succeed in this field?**
“If you look at people who go into orthopaedic surgery, they enjoy analyzing a problem and finding the best solution in a timely manner. That immediate, hands-on, solve the problem mentality is important. I also tell my female students that you don’t need the strength of a lineman to do orthopaedics. Finesse and teamwork are more important.”

**You serve as a mentor, what advice do you give?**
“The advice I always give medical students—and I tell them this is true whether you go into orthopaedics or not—is that you want to do things in medical school to stand out when applying for a residency program. It’s not only the grades, it’s the other things you do… the extra steps that put you ahead of the crowd.”
From your vantage point, what do you see as the future of orthopaedics?
“IT’S A VERY WIDE OPEN FIELD. THERE’S A LOT OF OPPORTUNITY WITH A HUGE VOLUME OF PATIENTS THAT REQUIRE TREATMENT, FROM NEWBORNS TO OUR SENIOR POPULATION.”
Fernando A. Ravessoud, MD, Orthopaedic Surgeon, Long Beach, California

Career Highlights
Past President of the American Orthopaedic Society of Sports Medicine
Former Team Physician for the Los Angeles Rams

Speak about motivation, how does that play into an orthopaedic residents success?
“You need to have the vision that you’re going to be successful, and focus that vision into the areas of orthopaedics where you can make the largest contribution. You must believe in yourself and not be afraid to work hard — you have to push the envelope.”

Are there any common myths about orthopaedics that you can dispel?
“First, that it is extremely difficult to get into an orthopaedic residency — that’s only partially true; and, second, that you’re not going to be physically strong enough to do it — that’s entirely a myth.”

There are relatively low numbers of minorities and women in orthopaedics, why do you think that is?
“Part of the problem is a lack of exposure. Because of the focus on primary care, orthopaedists have limited interaction with the medical students.”

What would you offer those considering a career in orthopaedics?
“Be prepared; and you have to stay focused on what you want to accomplish.”

Clarence L. Shields, MD
Kerlan-Jobe Clinic - Sports Medicine
Los Angeles, California

Medical School: Creighton University
Residency: UCLA

Medical School: Creighton University
Residency: UCLA
Preparing for an orthopaedic residency

Years one and two
- Enlist in AAOS Mentoring Program
- Pursue an orthopaedic-related research opportunity
- Network

Years three and four
- Beginning of full-time clinical experience
- Arrange to do an internship in a program that interests you and has a strong reputation in orthopaedics
- Apply to an orthopaedic residency program

Take the next step in your medical career!

Apply to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons’ unique, one-on-one mentoring program. To learn more, contact us at:

mentor@aaos.org. Or call 800-626-6726

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