

Temple University School of Medicine - Standardized Patient Program

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT WORKING AS A STANDARDIZED PATIENT FOR TEMPLE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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Please read this material very carefully for a full understanding of the work.
Please do NOT apply for work until you have read it completely.

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What is a “Standardized Patient?”

A Standardized Patient is someone who has been trained to simulate, in a consistent, disciplined, standardized manner, a patient in a medical situation. Standardized Patients, or “SPs,” are used by Temple’s School of Medicine, and by many other medical institutions, to train and evaluate students. SPs learn a case, based on a real patient other than themselves, and are interviewed and examined by students as though they were that person in the doctor’s office or clinic, giving that patient’s history, and simulating their physical signs, such as pain or difficulty walking.

I’ve seen advertisements for research subjects. Is being a standardized patient like that?

No. Most people think of medical research subjects as people who take medications or are on certain diets, and then have their reactions to them studied. This is very different. We are teaching and assessing the students, not the patients. We use standardized patients to simulate situations for the students, such as meeting a new patient for the first time in a clinic, and interviewing them about their problems, examining them, and counseling the patient.

What types of physical examination would be involved?

They would be very common examinations of the type that you would have done in a doctor’s office. For example, they may: listen to your heart and lungs with a stethoscope; press on your abdomen looking for tenderness or swellings; look into your eyes, ears, and throat; take your blood pressure; assess your muscle strength; check your reflexes; check your pulses etc. **Female breast examinations are not permitted, but the breasts may be exposed or touched as necessary parts of other examinations, as for example of the heart.** None of the examinations involve taking any blood or other samples; no needles are used. The students would not be doing genital or rectal examinations. You would not be given any drugs.

How do I know what to say and do when the student interviews and examines me?

You would be trained to be able to portray the patient. We create a complete history for you to learn. It includes the patient’s complaint for which she or he comes to see the doctor, her/his past medical history, and details about her/his life such as her job, her/his family and activities. We also describe the emotional state she/he is in when she/he sees the doctor. By learning that history you can learn to simulate that person, and speak to the doctor just as they would. We would also show you how to move like that patient, and how to react to the physical examination. For example, you may be portraying someone with a bad back. We would show you where it hurts and what the patient could or could not do because of the back problem. If you are supposed to portray someone with a pain in the abdomen you would be shown how to react when it is palpated (pressed on) in certain places.

That sounds like acting. Do I have to be an actor?

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No. Some SPs are trained and experienced actors but most are not. You can be a very good SP without ever having been on stage or in a movie. There are some similarities to what actors do, but there are differences too. For most cases, if you are the right sort of person we can train you to do the job regardless of your experience.

I am an actor. This should be easy for me and good experience too.

Perhaps. But you may find it much more difficult than working from a script or within dramatic improvisational outlines, and you may find it very frustrating. This work has nothing to do with finding dramatic or comedic moments or playing to an audience. It has everything to do with disciplining yourself within the needs of the case and the teaching of the students. It can be very repetitive, as exactly the same patient must be presented for every student. Some actors find this difficult, annoying, or boring, and we cannot use them, while others are very fine SPs, and can use their skills to present patients that are difficult for non-actors to simulate. Remember too that this work is confidential. You will not be permitted to use the material in any public or private performance.

Is it safe?

Yes. There is no reason for anyone to do anything that might be harmful. You are not really sick, just simulating someone who is sick, so whether or not the student knows what is wrong and what to do about it doesn't matter. The examinations are very basic and do not cause any harm to the SP. At most there might be some brief discomfort. If you had cause for concern you would be entitled to stop any examination.

Do the students know we are not real patients?

Yes. We aren't trying to deceive anyone. Students are told they will be working with SPs, and are told to behave just as they are being trained to do with real patients. Students very much like working with SPs.

I've had a couple of health problems in the past. Can I still be a Standardized Patient?

Probably you can be, if you are suitable in every other way. Everyone has had some sort of medical history. Sometimes it doesn't matter if the SP has had a problem that the patient they are portraying has not had. Sometimes it does, but that might only mean that that particular SP cannot portray that particular patient, and they could be quite suitable for another case. But remember, **this work is not about your health**. Having had an extensive history of illnesses or injuries will not give you an advantage in this work. If anything, it may conflict with cases that we would want SPs to do, and thus disqualify you from much work. Please do NOT give us information about your health history in your application; it will NOT improve your chances of getting hired. Furthermore, **do not apply for this work if you expect to obtain free health care as part of it; that will not happen**.

Why do you need Standardized Patients? I thought medical students learned with real patients.

Some things are better done with SPs. For example, we can have one SP be seen by a number of students and behave each time as though it were the first time they have come to see a doctor for their problem. Using SPs allows students to practice before they work with the real patients, to make mistakes, and learn from their mistakes, without doing anything to a real patient—counseling them badly, taking a poor history, or performing an inadequate examination, as examples—that might be upsetting or harmful. This is not intended to replace the experience they will need with real patients, but rather to prepare them for that training, so that they can do a better job with the real patients, and learn more from them, when the time comes. And when SPs are used in students' exams they can be more consistent, and therefore more fair, than real patients.

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What types of people do you need?

Just as there are all kinds of real patients we would like to have a corps of SPs representing all ages and physical types, both men and women. You must be 18 or older, but there is no upper age limit.

Do I need to know a lot about medicine?

No. We will teach you what you need to know.

Will I need to take my clothes off?

Yes, sometimes. If the students are only required to interview the patient then you will not need to. But in some situations you would be undergoing physical examination, and for that you would be dressed in a hospital gown, open at the back, with underwear on underneath. You would know ahead of time when this would be expected. **Women may be asked to remove their bras for some examinations, such as listening to the heart, and they would be expected to do so, though this happens rarely.** Genital and rectal examinations are not permitted so there is no reason for total nudity. In some cases certain pulses should be checked at locations underneath the underwear, but the underwear does not need to be removed.

This all sounds very unusual and interesting, but it is so unusual I'm not sure whether I would be able to do it well, or whether I would like it.

It is unusual and interesting! And most SPs come to enjoy the work very much, but it is understandable that you would be concerned. That's why we want you to understand completely what is involved.

How often would I work, and when?

That is very difficult to say. This is an ever-changing program at Temple, and while it may expand in the future, there will always be only a very limited amount of work; this can never be considered steady work for SPs. **You should not count on any amount of income from working as an SP at Temple. Typically, in the first year of work a new SP may earn only a few hundred dollars, or even nothing at all.** Initially you might work only a very few hours over the course of months, or not work at all for some time. Being hired does not guarantee you any work, and it will never become a regular or full-time job.

(The application form will ask you for "minimal expected salary," and it is, unfortunately, a standard form that will have \$20,000 as the lower value. Please just select \$20,000, but understand it has no real meaning for this work. Where you are asked to enter manually "Minimum salary required" you should enter \$20.00.)

What we do is maintain a roster of people we can draw on as needed. We would match you as closely as possible with the patient you are going to simulate and consider the skills and experience you have in relation to the project needs, and then match schedule needs to SP availability. We contact you and offer the work, and you are free to accept or not. **Please note that once you agree to work on a particular day it is absolutely essential that you meet that work commitment, just as you would with any job.**

What is a typical work day or work week?

There is no one standard situation; it depends on the nature of the particular project. We do a lot of different projects in a lot of different ways. Some projects consist of a few hours for one or two afternoons in a single

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week. Others will involve more afternoons; still others may involve full days, 4 or 5 days a week for one week or several. Do not expect any standard schedule or regular work.

Nearly all of the work we do is during the day, Mondays to Fridays, and some classes and exams run into early evenings. That is when the students have their classes, so that is when SPs are needed to work. There is no flexibility on that. If you cannot work during the weekdays we will almost certainly not be able to engage you. Training sessions for SPs are more flexible, but may involve evenings or Saturdays. We will try to accommodate your schedules for training whenever possible, but if a number of SPs are needed we would want you to train with the others. Please note that training is mandatory; you cannot work unless you attend training.

How much notice would I get?

We try to schedule well in advance, a month to two months ahead, if possible. Sometimes needs come up at shorter notice and we will ask you if you can work. Remember that you are never obliged to accept any work, but of course more work will go to those who are more available, and they are more likely to be invited first.

How much does the job pay?

We are now paying \$20.00 per hour for both the training and the work itself, though **you will not be paid for training if you do not complete a scheduled project**. No benefits are paid. A \$5.00 per session travel expense compensation is paid for each session attended. No other parking or transport accommodations are made. No meals or refreshments are provided at any time.

Where would I be working?

All of our work at present is in buildings on the Temple Health Sciences Campus on North Broad Street just between Allegheny Avenue and Erie Avenue. There is the possibility of some work at other locations in the future.

Would I be an employee of Temple?

Yes. SPs are hired as “Temporary Part-Time On-Call” Employees. You will have a Temple ID card, which you will need to have with you to be able to enter Temple buildings for work. Duration of employment is from start to the end of the fiscal year, June 30. SPs may be re-hired if their work has been suitable. Taxes are deducted from pay at source. You would be able to determine your tax status and how much should be withheld, and you would receive a W-2 earnings record form for tax purposes. Payment is usually made by direct deposit to your bank account.

How do you choose who will become an SP?

We will interview people individually to find out if they are suitable. We need people who understand well the unusual requirements of this work. You should be comfortable with your own health and in your dealings with the health professions. This is not a place to be able to pursue your own agenda with doctors or the medical system. You must be completely comfortable with undergoing repeated physical examinations, and being disrobed under those circumstances, including during training sessions with other SPs. Good reading and verbal communications skills are very important, as you will be given a lot of written material, and you will be expected to speak with Temple doctors and students regularly and effectively in a professional manner. It will be essential that anyone engaged as an SP not have any biases based on gender, race, religion, national origin, physical characteristics, and so forth. Temple’s medical students come from a very wide variety of

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backgrounds, and you must be fair to every student. As with any job, reliability and punctuality are essential. Finally, you must agree to confidentiality. The cases you portray must not be discussed with anyone.

I've been an SP for other organizations. Would I be able to work for Temple?

Your previous experience could be useful, but we cannot automatically say we would be able to engage you. You should also remember that some aspects of the work may be different from what you are used to, and you would have to work as instructed for Temple's needs. If you are continuing to work as an SP elsewhere you are certainly welcome to work for Temple as well, but remember that you cannot fail to meet your obligations to Temple at any time because of other work, nor should you let down any other SP program.

I think I could do this job. It sounds easy enough.

Think again before you decide. **This job is NOT easy and it is NOT for everyone.** It requires intense concentration while you are being interviewed and examined. You must be able to respond exactly as the real patient would, and only as that patient, never as yourself. You must be able to maintain not only the patient's character but also simulate their physical condition during the interview and examination, and to do so repeatedly in a consistent manner. You may be required to discuss the encounter afterward with the student, and for that you would have to recall the encounter precisely, and describe carefully your reaction to it. You may be asked to document the events of an encounter accurately from memory. You must be able to keep your own opinions and concerns in abeyance and follow the school's curriculum and teaching methods. You would be subject to observation and other quality assurance procedures. The job requires energy, memorization, discipline, concentration, excellent communication skills, and a high level of comfort with your own health and in dealing with doctors. **Being a Standardized Patient is hard work, and we will be demanding a high level of job performance from our SPs.**

I'm still interested. What do I do next?

To apply, please go to the Temple Human Resources webpage and complete the application form, using this link:

https://hosspats.adminsvc.temple.edu/css_external/cssPage_Welcome.asp

From this page select the "Find Jobs" tab at the top left in the red bar. The "Find Jobs" page will come up. Under "Search Jobs" you can enter "Standardized Patient" as the Keyword and click on the gray "Find Jobs" tab at the bottom. That will take you directly to the "SearchJobs Results" and you can click on "Standardized Patient (temporary, on-call)" to take you to the application for the SP work.

You may also go to the Temple website: www.temple.edu and go to Jobs@Temple.

If you do not have internet access or need further assistance you may go to the Human Resources office on the 3rd floor of the Temple Student/Faculty Center, 3340 North Broad Street, at the northwest corner of Broad and Ontario streets. They are open each working day from 8 to 5, and you do not need to make an appointment. We cannot mail out application forms.

Once you have made an application it will be forwarded to the SP Program for review. Depending on our needs we will call you and arrange an individual interview; not everyone who applies may be interviewed. Following the interview if we want to engage you we will have HR contact you to complete the necessary documentation. You will need to provide references to be checked, preferably work-related, but could be personal. Your educational history will be checked. Once these checks are done, you will receive a job offer and a request to

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provide information for taxation and deposit of your pay to a bank account. Once that is done you will need to actually visit the HR department to show identification and Social Security documentation. HR will take your photo for ID badges and give you the badge at that time. From that point you will be eligible for work, and we will call you as possible work becomes available.

If you have further questions before applying, please contact:

Michael Curtis, Director, SP Program, at (215) 707-3645 or curtism@temple.edu

Link to Application form:

https://hospat.adminsvc.temple.edu/css_external/cssPage_Welcome.asp

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Thank you for your interest in our program.