

As an undergraduate, I majored in psychology because I craved insight into human behavior. While I enjoyed my psychology classes and learned a lot from them, I had a strong sense that something important was missing. Because of this, I selected classes that were cross-listed with the biology department and in the process became fascinated with biology in general and neuroscience in particular. An opportunity to volunteer in the [redacted] Lab, researching the significance of circadian functioning and genetics in bipolar disorder, enabled me to explore my new interest. Through discussions in lab and weekly research meetings, I came to realize the tremendous potential that this research offered for those living with a particular mental illness and to appreciate having a role, however small, in the process.

My desire for further involvement with research connected me with Dr. [redacted], a child psychiatrist who needed assistance with finding and evaluating articles for a presentation on alternative medicine at [redacted]. In Dr. [redacted], an accomplished practitioner and researcher with great compassion for his patients, I saw a role model. It was through extended conversations with him that I was inspired to consider a career in medicine. It seemed to me that medicine would offer me the opportunity to acquire the kind of comprehensive understanding of human beings that I was seeking, as well as the potential for a greater contribution.

The semester after I began working for Dr. [redacted], to further explore my new interest in medicine, I enrolled in my first pre-medical classes and was selected to participate in [redacted] and the [redacted] Clinic. For [redacted], I volunteered as a health service intern, mentoring disadvantaged youth in [redacted]. At the clinic, I served as a caseworker for homeless clients. At first, as a Caucasian girl from a privileged background, I felt intimidated. How could I possibly understand how it felt to be an African American child failing classes, with both parents in prison and unavailable, or what it was like to battle a crystal meth addiction? But I discovered that by simply listening patiently when tutoring or recommending services, people felt recognized and were more open to assistance.

A few months after I became involved as a health service intern with [redacted], I began working for [redacted], which was particularly rewarding to me, as a Type 1 diabetic. A summer camp counselor and year-round volunteer, I drew upon my experiences with this chronic illness in coaching newly diagnosed diabetics through their first injections and in speaking on panels to parents about life with diabetes. Under the supervision of healthcare professionals, I determined insulin dosages, administered glucagon injections and monitored blood sugar levels. This experience taught me that medical management varies widely among individuals. It also gave me an appreciation for the importance of personalized care. Later, I became a diabetic lead volunteer at [redacted], training non-diabetic staff about diabetes.

During the course of my healthcare related experiences as an undergraduate, I felt increasingly motivated to pursue a career in medicine. After graduating, I tested this career choice before applying to medical schools, which led me to my current position as a back office clinical assistant and clinical research coordinator for Dr. [redacted], a [redacted]. Following clinical research subjects, in addition to taking down patient history and assisting with simple procedures, has given me a feeling for the dual role I would like to have as both clinician and researcher.

I have been very fortunate to work for Dr. [redacted], who has become my mentor. Among other qualities, Dr. [redacted]'s initiative in developing and implementing novel treatments has suggested to me a model of an effective physician. Dr. [redacted] left his [redacted] residency to pursue [redacted]. His tenacity in pursuing what he believed to be the future of medicine has inspired me to think along similar lines. As a Type 1 diabetic, I have witnessed first-hand the impact of this type of innovative thinking and the power of new medical solutions. I recently benefitted from a newly developed continuous glucose monitor to track my nighttime blood sugar levels and to awaken me if I became hypoglycemic.

I have also personally observed the benefits of innovative thinking leading to new solutions for other medical conditions. The clinical trial subjects I followed at Dr. [redacted]'s practice reported fewer urinary tract symptoms after receiving an investigational device for their benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). Likewise, several bipolar subjects in the [redacted] Lab study experienced fewer manic episodes after synchronizing their daily schedules with their natural circadian rhythms.

The development of my interests and activities during the past several years has been a process of questioning, experimentation and reflection. It is humbling to realize that I have only just begun to see what medicine has to offer. At the same time, what I have learned and witnessed motivates me to contribute to progress in this exciting field.