

## Medical School Personal Statement

I was five years old when I witnessed one of my sister's epileptic seizures. Alice's eyes glazed over as her right arm shook violently and her bluish lips smacked as she struggled for more oxygen. Listening from the doorway, I clung desperately to my stuffed animal, Bunny, as my mother dialed 911. When the ambulance pulled away with my father and sister inside, I stood at the window watching as my mom comforted me. As a child, I saw Alice convulse countless other times. Her continued, unpredictable seizures, which occurred while walking to school, jogging, and sitting in church, led to my early interest in medicine and to learning more about patients like my sister who struggle with neurological disorders.

Throughout my childhood I observed more of the devastating effects of epilepsy as I saw Alice undergo numerous treatments, including frequent drug adjustments and in-patient monitoring. I spent many hours with her in the hospital after each of her five brain surgeries, which resulted in a left temporal lobectomy and a dangerous infection. At that time, I was sometimes more concerned with the colored gauze used for dressings than the pallid color of her swollen face, with the cable TV than the monitors recording her brain activity, or with the woman bringing crafts than Alice's partially-shaved head. I later understood the significance of the procedures, which neurosurgeons performed in an attempt to stop her seizures at their origin; the therapeutic benefits lasted only one year, while the negative effects continue today. Alice suffers from frequent and varying types of intractable seizures and also experiences difficulty with short and long-term memory. The consequences for Alice are profound: she cannot drive, go to school, or work. She spends most of her time walking our dogs, watching movies, and volunteering with children. Owing to her decreased quality of life, Alice has struggled with disappointment, anger, jealousy, and fear. For these reasons, I am more committed than ever to study science and medicine.

I tested this commitment to medicine when I worked with underprivileged populations in Kolkata, India in 2008. My primary responsibilities included feeding, bathing, and playing with handicapped children at a Mother Teresa mission and visiting with patients in a tuberculosis hospital. The most significant experience from the trip took place at a leprosy mission. The afternoon was unbearably hot and humid—countless patients occupied small cots covered with dirty, damp bedding, which seemed to symbolize the stigma long-associated with leprosy. An elderly patient who spoke only a tribal language gestured for me to sit next to him on his hospital cot. When I took his rough, dry, deformed hand in mine, he looked at me with tear-filled eyes. This man, rejected by society, hadn't felt the touch of a human hand in a long time. His response in this seemingly ordinary moment underscored the value of every human life and the importance of delivering fair and effective treatment to all patients.

When I worked as a certified nursing assistant in the float pool at a community hospital, I often recalled the man with leprosy and made an effort to appreciate each patient and to provide the best service possible, whether it was taking vital signs, answering call lights, changing bed pans, or giving baths. This job has allowed me to care for a variety of patients in the intensive care, orthopedic, medical/surgical, and progressive care units, which has increased my clinical knowledge. The case of a twenty-three year old male who was admitted into the ICU for a heart attack was both fascinating and educational. The impressive technology employed to cool his body in order to allow his heart to repair itself saved the young man's life. Working in the hospital has fostered a growth in my character, bedside manner, and medical knowledge.

My experiences in India and at the community hospital have been invaluable, but Alice's epilepsy has focused my energy and interest and remains a primary concern for me as a sister and as a future doctor. Witnessing her memory deficit, her inability to maintain employment or to continue her education, and the limitations of her dreams inspired me to write a literature review on catamenial epilepsy for my psychopharmacology class. Though this condition is diagnosed in only one percent of epileptic patients, it has significant effects, including unlikely reproduction and a decreased life expectancy. To increase my knowledge about the treatment of this population of patients, I plan to conduct original research in the fall of 2011 on the effects of an anti-epileptic drug on learning and memory in a female rat model. Additionally, an internship at the Institute of Neurosciences Kolkata this summer (2011) will provide a unique opportunity to participate in the treatment and care of neurological patients in a different culture. As I witness Alice's ongoing treatment and continue to pursue ventures in neuroscience, I become more passionate about becoming a physician capable of treating suffering patients like my sister.