

Medical School Personal Statement

Already diagnosed with appendicitis at an urgent care center, I waited for hours in the reception area of the emergency room. I contemplated calling an ambulance to get more immediate treatment, but I was in too much pain. When I was eventually brought to a bed, I was told that my appendix had burst. The ER staff was hesitant to treat me, however, because I was a minor without proof of insurance and without my parents, who were out of the country. I was frightened to hear someone considering sending me to Children's Hospital. Then a doctor came to my side and offered words I will never forget: "Would you like pain medicine?" Later, the same doctor decided that I should not be transferred to Children's Hospital because I was too sick to delay treatment. Because of this physician, I received the care I needed.

This was not my first experience with an exemplary physician. My mother is a family practitioner, so medicine has been a part of my life. She practiced in our small home town, so I often ran into her patients at the grocery store. Every time, they asked, "Are you going to be a doctor like your mom when you grow up?" I always nodded yes. Without fail, their next words were, "Your mom's the best doctor in town." And they meant every word. As a child I had my own television-inspired ideas of my mom's job, but I grew to understand that, as a family doctor, she often helped people with chronic ailments and promoted their life-long health. My mother's patients valued how she treated them as human beings as much as how she healed them. After years of watching her interact with her patients, both in person and over the phone, I want to be like her: a physician who listens and treats the individual as well as the disease.

Although my mother has always been my primary role model, I chose a circuitous route to medicine; I studied Spanish and Latin American culture rather than science. I was aware, however, of the need for Spanish-speaking doctors because my mom volunteered at a clinic in Louisville, KY where many patients spoke Spanish. She always wished she had learned Spanish. Knowing this, I began volunteering as an interpreter at the Physician's Free Clinic in Columbus, OH where many nights the Spanish-speaking patients account for over half of the total clientele. I go from room to room interpreting for physicians of many specialties. On one occasion I interpreted the (good) news to a woman that she was pregnant, and another occasion I interpreted the same (this time not-so-good) news to a teenage girl. I then helped these patients navigate around the clinic to get their blood drawn, schedule follow-up appointments, and meet with our social worker.

Even before my volunteer experience, I had always been interested in the health of others. This is one reason why, soon after I became a student of yoga, I found myself wanting to teach the therapeutic practice. The extent to which yoga can improve quality of life fascinates me. For example, a fellow yogi told me of his struggle with foot drop due to multiple sclerosis and how he became virtually symptomless after practicing yoga. The anecdotal evidence for the benefits of yoga is abundant, but the science behind the benefits is less readily available. I have pursued the knowledge of physiology that explains such phenomena in two ways. I have completed 66 hours of pre-med, post baccalaureate science courses to obtain the background knowledge necessary to gain an understanding of the human body. I am also a clinical research assistant and yoga therapist for Dr. Kiecolt-Glaser, who is studying how yoga will decrease pain and fatigue and improve mood in breast cancer survivors-- research that merges my interests in people, science and health. As the yoga therapist, I devote over 36 hours to working with each survivor and developing trusting relationships. This helps the women relax during class, and I am better able to assist them in improving flexibility and range of motion at their

treatment sites. I feel gratified when a student tells me that she is able to kneel in church for first time in years, or fall asleep without anxiety for the first time ever. This experience, combined with a medical degree, will give me a unique perspective on the science--and art--of medicine and help me to optimize healing in the allopathic world.

Obviously, I survived my ER experience, partly because my appendix had not actually ruptured, as was first believed, but mostly because a competent surgeon performed a successful emergency appendectomy. And even under the delirium that was initially caused by excruciating pain and later by intravenous morphine, I remember two questions the doctor asked me, "Do you care if you have belly scars?" and "What color scrub hat do you want to wear into surgery?" Despite the circumstances, he was half-joking with me and treating me as a human being, rather than as just another patient--and that is what I remember. When my yoga students, who also happen to be cancer survivors, talk about their oncologists, sometimes they mention their competence (which is also of critical importance), but they, too, mostly remember their physicians' compassion. I hope to be a competent, compassionate member of the profession I have admired for so long.