

After finishing college, I held two degrees, each representing an important side of me. Mechanical engineering spoke to my scientific nature, while film studies presented an opportunity to try to understand and make a connection with people. I worked in both industries separately but found myself searching for a way to bring these two sides of me together. My passion for film was rooted in a desire to have a positive affect on peoples' lives. It was this desire that finally lead me to pursue a life in medicine, and more specifically, family medicine.

In medical school, my experiences with the myriad of people I have met strengthened this decision even more. Two such people were TK and RC. TK was a 10 year old at the [clinic 1], a homeless shelter for women with children, where I worked as part of a Bridging the Gaps community health summer internship. Before I worked with TK, she had no understanding of proper dental hygiene. The plaque and decay on her teeth showed that she rarely brushed her teeth. By teaching her and the other children how to floss and brush their teeth twice a day, I made a positive impact on their lives while learning about the importance of community health and prevention. RC was an Indonesian immigrant in his forties who came to the free Chinatown Clinic complaining of fatigue. His history included significant cardiac morbidity, but I also probed for psychosocial factors that may have contributed to such a non-specific symptom. When I spoke to RC about his sleeping habits and changes to his daily routine, he realized that his increased work hours and fear of being fired had added stress to his life. RC was grateful for our talk, during which we discussed ways he could find help to better cope with this stress, and our encounter taught me the benefits of knowing what community and social services are available to patients.

The places I have worked as a medical student opened my eyes to the truly diverse populations I will see as a family doctor and to the challenges I will face connecting with some patients. While volunteering at the Streetside Health Clinic, I treated many intravenous drug users. Our sensitivity training for the clinic encouraged us to inquire about our patients' experiences with other health care providers. These patients were often afraid to seek medical attention, because they were treated poorly after revealing their addictions. Nevertheless, many returned to Streetside for non-judgmental care of their injuries and illnesses and for information on drug addiction treatment. Another experience that bolstered my ability to empathize and connect with hard to reach patients occurred at [clinic 1]. The [clinic 1] mothers were often distrustful of the students assigned to help them, but over the course of the summer, we gained their trust by answering their questions and teaching them about their bodies and the health of their families. Interacting with these families provided me with a hopeful glimpse into what it might be like to work as a family physician and to reach more challenging populations.

Outside of medical school, I discovered a unique Shaolin gong-fu class at a local community college that helped me in unexpected ways with my medical training. Through meditation and strength building I became more focused and confident in my abilities. I was also inspired by other aspects of the traditional Shaolin way of life, which includes improving the situation of others. After residency, I plan to focus on helping low-income and underserved populations. With this in mind, I am excited to join a residency through which I can build on the lessons I have learned for treating patients and their community.

Over the past few years, I enjoyed the challenges of connecting with hard-to-reach patients and discussing difficult cases with colleagues and teachers. I know that I have much to learn about family and community medicine, but believe that my present skills will fit well into a residency program committed to advocating for patients as well as treating their maladies. I look forward to expanding my repertoire of knowledge and skills in a collaborative atmosphere dedicated to improving the health, lives, and community of our patients.