

Personal statement

Like many of my colleagues who are also applying for residencies, I recently took a moment to look back at my original medical school application, and it was amusing yet shocking to see how little I knew then of a life in medicine. Despite the fact that my father is a doctor, I had a very poor grasp of what it takes to be a physician. Now that I have a better idea, I can proceed in my career path with much more confidence that I am doing the right thing for me. I believe that not only will I be a good doctor, but that I will have a good life as a doctor.

In terms of being an excellent physician, I think that my greatest strength is humility. On the one hand, I know myself well enough to know my weaknesses and shortcomings, and thus I know when to ask for help. This is, in my mind, perhaps the most important quality a responsible physician must have. On the other hand, for me humility is also an integral part of my faith as a Christian - knowing that no matter what I know or what I do, the end is not really in my hands. This has already been a valuable perspective for me in my clerkship experiences with death and suffering, and I know it will continue to be important in my practice.

Along the same lines, I believe that integrity is a tremendously important quality for a physician to have, and this is something that I have been working towards all my life and particularly during medical school. As with any person in a position of leadership or responsibility, a doctor's beliefs and words and actions must be in concordance in order for patients to trust them. At the most obvious level this includes the importance of maintaining a proper diet and exercise regimen and spending time with one's family, as many doctors advise their patients but fewer manage to do themselves. At a deeper level integrity entails providing the fullest care appropriate to every patient, as we claim we do, regardless of our personal feelings. This has been most difficult for me even as a medical student, struggling to do the best work possible even when it's been a long day or night. The best assistance I have had in this area has been the attending physicians I have had as role models, who take the time to do things right even though they have less free time than I do.

Another significant personality asset is my ability to get along well with others. (It's interesting to me that an attribute we were all graded upon in elementary school is such an important part of professional life.) I am an excellent listener, and usually make a strong team effort. I think this has enhanced my relationships with my patients tremendously, creating a level of trust. Perhaps even more importantly, I have been able to work well with the other members of my team, and my experiences in team-oriented patient care have been very rewarding.

Academically, while I have enjoyed my various research opportunities, my greatest pleasures have come through teaching. I've formally worked with both children and college students in recent years, and those experiences have been extremely challenging but also immensely satisfying. I am also planning to do some student teaching in the basic sciences here at UVA medical school during this upcoming year. I hope to use these instructional and communication skills not only as a resident but in the rest of my career, to help my patients better understand and cope with their medical issues.

Finally, I feel that I will have a good life as an internist because I love it. I think I resisted that idea for a long time, in large part because my father is an internist and I felt an urge to do something different. But I knew during my surgery rotation that I enjoyed going to clinic more than going to the OR, and during my psychiatry rotation I read up on any of the organic diseases that my patients had in order to explain them more clearly. And during my medicine rotation, I truly enjoyed working up mysterious patients and navigating a complex differential diagnosis to come up with an appropriate plan of action. My favorite part of the day, though, was just talking with my patients about their lives and experiences. Even when we dealt with serious illness and death, I invariably left that day feeling satisfied I had been part of something worthwhile, and I cannot imagine that we can ask for more than that in this life.