

I believe that teaching is the highest art of medicine. A "doctor," in Latin, is "one who conveys wisdom and knowledge to others." When I decided to pursue medicine as a career, I saw many opportunities to teach and, in turn, to learn from my patients and colleagues. To be a teacher of pediatrics, I will communicate with both children and their parents. I will strive to understand the natural history of a disease so that I may appreciate the intervention that halts its progression. It will require compassion and patience with children whose illnesses sometimes appear insurmountable. I will be a part of the family's experience, both the joy in recovery and the disappointment of medicine's shortcomings.

My past experiences have centered on children with disabilities, from the physically and neurodevelopmentally impaired to the mildly learning disabled. My brother, who is severely mentally retarded, has been my inspiration and my lifelong best friend. I feel privileged to work with children who are unquestionably accepting of kindness, eager to learn, willing to ask questions, and proud of their accomplishments. My brother and other exceptional children have been among my best teachers.

During high school, I gained an appreciation for these children's special qualities while working at a summer recreation program for mentally retarded children and assistant coaching a Special Olympics soccer team. Communication was always the hardest barrier to overcome in all my interactions, so I took a course in Sign Language and practiced signing with my brother. During college, I learned about motivation from a young girl with a mild learning disability. I tutored Laura for two years in Latin, a language she chose mostly to prove to herself and others that she was capable. During medical school, I researched gastrostomy-associated mortality in children with neurodevelopmental disabilities, and spent time in the developmental clinics at Kluge Children's Rehabilitation Center. The doctors, nurses, social workers, and families taught me how they all play a critical role in the care of children with cerebral palsy, myelomeningocele, and many other neurodevelopmental disorders. I learned that simple milestones can be immense obstacles for a child with a disability, and meeting these goals is a tremendous accomplishment that the pediatrician is allowed to celebrate with the family.

Through broader experience, I am realizing that children are disabled by many illnesses and life circumstances. I have been a Big Buddy to a 7-year old with leukemia for the past two years. He has taught me that while cancer is a terrifying disease, I should not fear the child with the illness. During my first year in medical school, I participated in Magic Circle, a group of students who volunteer at the Charlottesville Center for Battered/Abused Women. We served as role models for children from abusive homes and gave them security and peaceful solutions to confrontation. For two years, I participated in an HIV/AIDS awareness group that visited schools to educate adolescents about sex, drugs, and incurable disease. Through work at the Charlottesville Free Clinic, I saw how poverty can reduce a child's potential for a healthy, happy life. Next year, I will spend two months in Ghana to learn about the medical needs and prevention of pediatric diseases in the third world. These diverse conditions disable children's natural coping mechanisms and restrict their potential for physical and emotional growth.

The field of pediatrics will allow me to pursue my greatest lifelong interest, teaching, in the form of assisting children in their struggle to grow and develop in many ways. Whether it is treating patients with chronic cardiac disease, neurodevelopmental impairments, or providing appropriate assistance in the third world, children have always provided my energy and

inspiration. As a pediatrician, I am confident that I will be conscientious, caring, and will keep the ideals of a good teacher at the forefront of my practice. The reward will be every child who overcomes a disabling condition as a result of the combined efforts of the family and physician.