

Though the words medicine and doctor have been in my vocabulary for many years, it was only recently that I decided to become a physician. My familiarity with medicine as a child was largely due to having an obstetrician/gynecologist as a father. This provided me many opportunities to see my father's career both at home and in the hospital. At home, there were numerous instances when family time was interrupted by the beeper or when I was awakened by the car starting up in the middle of the night. It was clear to me that being a doctor required a substantial amount of time, energy, and the ability to handle pressure. At the hospital, I saw that doctors were healers, women and men who not only could cure sickness, but also could calm the worries of their patients and their patients' families with a gentleness that instilled confidence. After seeing their smiling faces, their gratitude never seeming to cease, I began to get a sense for what my father had described to me as a feeling of accomplishment and reward. Thus, my decision to pursue a career in medicine was not a sudden awakening, but rather the summation of many influential experiences.

One experience which has been particularly inspiring has been volunteering. At St. Francis Hospital in Washington state, I tended to patients' bedsides in the Intensive Care Unit, under the supervision of an internist and several nurses. Though my job entailed feeding the patients and restocking supplies, my most important task was interacting with sick patients and providing moral support. I learned that even though I did not have the ability to heal others, I still could make a positive impact on the patients with a simple smile and some encouraging words. At present, I am volunteering in the Child Life program at the Johns Hopkins Hospital where I have been working with chronically ill children of all ages. Sometimes it is a bedtime story, other times a jigsaw puzzle. Underneath it all, I cannot help feeling happiness by playing with these young children, who with the help of volunteers, are able to overcome some of the loneliness and sadness of their illnesses.

Along with comprehending the unique relationship between doctor and patient, my clinical experiences have also made it apparent to me that we are still a long way from conquering cancer and other baffling diseases. Nothing could have made a more profound impact on me in that sense than my grandmother's bout with gallbladder cancer, a terminal disease which literally drained the life right out of her body, and with it, my own naïve assumption that doctors could remedy any situation. Though this event disheartened me, I soon discovered a means of fighting these killers as well as my own sense of defeat. During my years at Johns Hopkins University, I was introduced to the world of biomedical research, which has allowed me to contribute my own thoughts and ideas towards understanding and defeating diseases like the one which took my grandmother and many others. The most challenging and rewarding research I have undertaken so far has been at the VA Medical Center in Seattle, WA. Under the mentorship of Dr. Hin Palk and Dr. Sum Lao, I characterized a complex protein aggregate found in human gallstones and gallbladder bile and formulated a hypothesis about its possible role in gallstone formation. We discovered that a calcium-binding protein complexes with at least three different membrane-associated enzymes, suggesting that gallstone formation is much more complex than it appears (*Gastroenterology*, May, 1995). Other research which I have found rewarding has been in the field of genetics where I am currently studying HIF-1 α , a transcriptional factor active in the regulation of gene expression during hypoxia. With the guidance of Dr. George Sonanza, I am learning to attack research problems with efficiency and precision in addition to broadening my own technical skills. Research not only has been fun and exciting, but also has been an intense mental challenge, honing the tools for problem solving which will be required of me as a physician.

My experiences with medicine so far have provided me both with valuable skills and insight into the patient doctor relationship. I look forward to devoting myself to the field of medicine in which I can tackle the complex problems of disease while providing solace to others.