

Physician, patient, surgery... vibrato, concert, harmony – two sets of words that have been native to my lexicon for years. As popular consensus would have it, the former word trio is ordinarily associated with the healing discipline of science, while the latter vocabulary set conjures images concerned with the realm of music. For most people, these two sets of words are perceived as intrinsic to separate lifestyles, patterns, and forms of expression. After all, is not science distinct and separate from art? According to western thought, the unanimous answer should be, “Yes;” mine, however, is not. I am diametrically opposed to the latter assumption, only because of my experience and achievements in both medical science and music. I have learned to appreciate the multifarious angles of medicine that waterfall so heavily with creativity and melodious undercurrents, as to break dams of stereotypes. In fact, I think that pigeonholing the realm of medicine into the category of ‘science’ alone is, in essence, akin to committing Hippocratic sin. From my experience, the field reflects the diverse nature of the contributors who define it, individuals who can more often than not adequately combine their right and left-brained tendencies,...their cyclopean powers of creativity with their razor sharp logic and collective ability to analyze.

In my earlier years, a decade’s worth of state, national, and international violin competitions and symphonic performances provided me with invaluable life experiences and a lifelong appreciation of the Arts. However, the latter also served as pollinator and landscaper for the garden of my naïve consciousness, provoking the blooms of discipline, team work, leadership, and role-modeling, while weeding out the pesky vines of slovenliness, apathy, and egocentrism. While I realized my potential as a musician during those rites-of-passage years, possibilities for growth in other arenas, especially that of science, were not made completely lucid until later. However, in retrospect I can appreciate that many of the qualities I strengthened as a young musician have since been instrumental (no pun intended) to/for my training as a scientist and benefactor of medicine.

As far as the latter is concerned, I credit my first influences to my father, an obstetrician/gynecologist, who unknowingly taught me my first “Introductory Course to Medicine 101.” From the paternal point of view, all during my childhood, one vantage was made particularly transparent: doctors are not just physical, but emotional healers, who not only attempt to metamorphosize disease from terminal to curative, but also calm the consciences of their patients/patients’ families with a gentleness that instills confidence, well-being, and positive energy.

Although my proximate perceptions of medicine bred appreciation and respect for those who were actively engaged in the field, it wasn’t until the latter portion of my adolescence that my calling to become a doctor became like a hunger, which only turns ravenous when not satiated. In the spring of my junior year, to fulfill a school curriculum requirement, I interned with a cardiologist, Dr. Lapis, who allowed me to observe him in his office and a local hospital. After witnessing various cardiovascular, abdominal, and orthopedic surgeries, I was fascinated at how surgeons had to be mechanics yet artists of the most complex living entity on earth. As a musician, I welcomed the parallels between music and medicine, the dedication, focus, and humanity associated with the two fields,...the overflowing creativity, as well.

In college, I felt further compelled to accept medicine as my destiny, and to realize my true potential as a scholar and researcher. In the midst of the ‘think-tank’ environment of Johns Hopkins, my Nobel-Laureate professors helped me hone my abilities to perpetually question the ‘obvious,’ in search of hidden truths. I applied what I learned during those pedantic years towards the research in which I chose to be aggressively engaged. Initially, this passionate aggression was largely influenced by the profound impact my grandmother’s death had on me. Her bout with gallbladder cancer not only drained life from her body, but, with it, my own naïve assumption that doctors could remedy any situation. Though this event disheartened me, it also illuminated me with the fiery desire to discern more about the process that claimed her. Later, under the auspices of Dr. Hin Palk and Dr. Sum Lao, I engaged in a study that established micelles in human bile as calcium-binding protein carriers with associated membrane enzymes. (Gastroenterology, May, 1995; the research culminated in a paper I first authored). While the latter lab project (performed at the VA Medical Center in Seattle, WA) was the most rewarding and challenging, to date, it also is significant in that it served as a drug, addicting me to research and all its clinical implications, which has ultimately served as the nucleus of my foundational quest to help humanity through the elucidation of human disease.

Other research projects in which I’ve been engaged include: working under the mentorship of Dr. Damian Pride at the Johns Hopkins Asthma and Allergy Center (9-92 to 5-93) in the discernment of bradykinin suppression as a more effective means of reducing allergy symptoms than anti-histamines; under the guidance of Dr. Noel Brown at the Johns Hopkins Medical School (6-92 to 9-92) in mapping the human brain using digital computer imaging; and with Dr. George Sonanza, in the field of genetics, studying HIF-1 α , a transcriptional factor active in the regulation of gene expression during hypoxia.

Beyond my latter experiences, though, other life segments I have found equally fortifying, as concerns my decision to enter the field of medicine, have been volunteering and successfully achieving my master’s degree in Public Health. At St. Francis Hospital in Washington State, under the supervision of an internist and several nurses, I tended to patients’ bedsides in the Intensive Care Unit. There, my most important task was interacting with sick patients and providing moral support. I learned that even though I did not yet have the ability to heal others directly, 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; there, I have been working with chronically ill children of all ages. Whether by reading bedtime stories or doing jigsaw puzzles with these children, by participating as one of the volunteers who help them surmount the emotional Fujis and turbulences associated with their illnesses, I can not help but become overwhelmed with peace.