

# ERIC ROACH

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My parents love telling stories from my childhood, sometimes to my embarrassment. One of their favorites involves several of my former elementary school teachers. According to these teachers, when their students were asked what they wanted to be when they were older, most would understandably reply fireman, astronaut, baseball player, etc. Meanwhile, my answer was always “research scientist.” At that age I certainly had no understanding of what that profession entailed, but I vividly remember having a passion for treating and curing cancer one day. I was engrained with this passion by watching many of my family members undergo the cancer experience, from diagnosis, through treatment, on to remission, and sometimes even death. By witnessing firsthand the effects a competent and compassionate physician could have on me and my family, I was able to gain valuable insight into the realm of cancer care that will serve me well as a physician.

I have always been attracted to science and technology. I was so intrigued by biology, chemistry, mathematics, and physics that I spent the majority of my freshman year without a declared major. I chose to immerse myself in a variety of courses with the intent of finding a topic that was both challenging and intellectually gratifying. It wasn't until the end of my freshman year that, after careful deliberation and advice from my mentors, I decided to major in physics and minor in mathematics. For me, this combination represented the foundation of all other sciences. By studying both, I hoped to gain a better understanding of chemistry, biology, and the many other disciplines. In order to pursue my interest further, I applied and was accepted to the Davis-Bahcall Scholars Program. During the summer after my freshman year, I spent one month learning about advanced physics topics and exploring some of the world's leading physics laboratories. After studying dark matter at the Sanford Underground Research Facility, nuclear astrophysics at Gran Sasso National Laboratory, and high-energy particle physics at Fermilab, I was left with no doubt that physics was right for me. However, although I was captivated by physics, it lacked the patient care that drew me to medicine in the first place.

Luckily, a family friend, who I had discovered was a radiation oncologist, allowed me to shadow her during spring break. I was immediately captivated. The ability to deliver precise treatment while avoiding the morbidity of surgery, the technology, and the face-to-face patient interaction were each immensely appealing. In medical school, I attempted to branch out by exploring other fields. While I was fascinated by the technicality of surgery, the challenging nature of complex medical management, and the comprehensive aspect of primary care, I was doubtful that I could feel fulfilled unless I followed my passion for cancer care. Much to my relief, I finally made the decision to focus my interests and pursue radiation oncology as a career.

While it is important to first become a competent clinician, I know I will not be truly fulfilled until I am able to advance the field through research and education. To me, these are the two primary methods of creating a lasting impact on treatment and care. Because of radiation oncology's high focus on research and education, I am only further drawn to its practice. In parallel to this, I have also come to realize the value of having a caring mentor to demonstrate the difference between being present and being fully immersed and invested in my learning environment. I have come to understand, appreciate, and practice the qualities of a strong mentor and I look forward to taking on these responsibilities as an attending physician.

My path to pursuing radiation oncology, like many others, has been gradual but focused. I am fortunate to have personally experienced compassionate care from the physicians that helped my family and me. For this reason, I intend to embody the traits of these physicians by giving back to the field through research and teaching and by providing competent and compassionate patient care.