

Personal Statement

I always knew I wanted to be a physician. This awareness provided a ready answer to any questions about my plans for the future. However, during medical school I found myself stumped by the question, “What kind of doctor do you want to be?” Faced with a now uncertain path, I was hopeful that serving patients during my clinical experiences would provide much-needed insight.

First, I completed nine months of clinical rotations as part of our school’s Frontier and Rural Medicine (FARM) program, which meant I was immersed in a rural town of 1,800 people. Being the only medical student at my clinical site allowed me to forge strong relationships with the patients in my community, afforded me an incredible amount of hands-on procedural experience, and granted me the opportunity to develop and work on a public health project where I trained hair stylists in rural communities to identify suspicious skin lesions. I enjoyed all of my clinical experiences, but I was still awaiting my “aha” moment of vocational clarity.

That moment came when I had the opportunity to complete a two-week dermatology rotation at the end of my third year. I loved everything about dermatology: the continuity of care, the diversity of patients, and the procedures. I had grown accustomed to knowing patients by name in my rural community and appreciated the similar continuity of care in the dermatology clinic. Also, I enjoyed the diversity of patients. In one day, I treated an infant with numerous strawberry hemangiomas, a thirty-year-old Native American woman with vitiligo, and a seventy-year-old man with skin cancer. Additionally, I liked the variety of procedures common in dermatology. My rural rotation provided me with numerous opportunities to assist in procedures; therefore, my attending dermatologist felt comfortable allowing me to do shave biopsies and other small procedures with her supervision.

Also intriguing is the way dermatology is interwoven with infectious disease, rheumatology, oncology, and immunology. Dermatology combines intricate, subtle visual diagnoses with what I find fascinating about internal medicine. Having educated hair stylists in rural towns about skin cancer detection and prevention continues to inspire me to advocate for public health. Dermatology provides numerous opportunities to educate others about simple changes they can make to lessen their risks for skin cancer.

Between graduating college and starting medical school, I spent a year serving with Lutheran Volunteer Corps in Tacoma, Washington at L’Arche where I supported adults with disabilities at a farm and garden program. The director of the organization would often reflect that everyone has challenges in their lives, but adults with disabilities wear their challenges on their sleeves. Similarly, patients with dermatologic diseases also wear their conditions for all to see. As a dermatologist, I can help my patients not only by treating their conditions, but also by providing them with supportive care so they may walk in the world with self-assurance. Now when my family and friends ask what kind of physician I hope to become, I can answer with confidence, “a dermatologist.”