Personal Statement: General Surgery Residency

I would classify resilience, compassion, and grit as my three strongest character traits. They are not only the vital attributes needed to become a qualified general surgeon, but also to become an exceptional practitioner. With these innate qualities and the support of my family, I am on track to achieve all the goals I have set forward thus far. The resilience I have cultivated allows me to continuously pursue personal advancements and strive for excellence regardless of the challenges I face. My parents are first generation immigrants. Growing up, I recognized many of the hardships they faced and this is where my resilience stems from. As far back as I can remember I have set goals, taken initiative, and organized step-by-step plans to ensure that I meet that goal with the intention of exceeding it. One of the earliest memories I have is winning the Good Christian Award in first grade, a challenge open to students from grades 1-8. As English is not my first language, I was primarily learning it through the school system and this competition required that students learn, memorize and be the first to recite, with perfection, the assigned biblical verses each week for one year. My mother shared that despite my language barrier, I was remarkably dead set on overcoming my personal obstacles despite the odds. It would be later in my life that my resilience would be the wind at my back once again, and help me with the many trials and tribulations I met as a young, single mother.

I have always had an interest in a career in medicine. My father is a well-respected internist. I remember him sharing stories about his experiences, and I was fascinated by his compassion and joy in helping others. My surgical interests developed while I was a program coordinator for orthopedic, women’s, and robotic surgery at a community hospital. I had the opportunity to engage at the individual patient level including pre-operative, post-operative, and discharge needs. It was my compassionate nature that allowed me to provide such warm bedside manners. Meeting each patient, getting to know their needs, and understanding how I could help address them before they came for surgery was the most rewarding part of my position. As a graduate with a Master's degree in Public Health, I have a better understanding of population health issues that often present in patient care, and can assist in developing solutions to improve health outcomes. I played an integral part in a pain management initiative in which post-surgical patients were provided an educational brochure that explained the goals of adequate pain management, helped identify their own individual goals, the pain scale, and an area where current pain medications could be documented. This provided an opportunity for patients to be more involved in their care and for better communication between patient and provider.

Grit is what I have built through the enduring process of becoming a successful general surgeon. Balancing my responsibilities as a young, single mother and my career aspirations has tested my endurance and commitment to pursuing this long-term goal of mine. When it was not ideal for me to apply to medical school during my son’s earliest years, I chose to pursue a Master’s in Public Health. While I knew this was not my true calling, it afforded me the opportunity to continue academic advancement and still be present at home for my son. As he got older, I decided to return to my pursuit of medicine. In 2017, with my parents' support, I was able to enroll in medical school in the Caribbean. I had to leave my son with my parents. My time apart from my son has been the hardest challenge I have had to face in my life. It is not lost on me that my pathway to surgery is akin to my non-traditional pathway in pursuit of medicine. However I am confident that with the accompaniment of these qualities, I can endure much more than perhaps my fear would allow me to believe. As Aristotle states, “excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives - choice, not chance, determines your destiny.”