

Carnegie Mellon University

At age ten, I left everything behind in China to start a new life with my parents in United States. It was not long before I realized that I was, in many ways, different from all the other kids in school. Gradually, I became less confident and more isolated. One day in the schoolyard, while I was playing hopscotch alone, a girl named Becca walked up to me and asked if she could join in. Although we had difficulty understanding one another's speech, we had no problem communicating through gestures and expressions. We soon realized that we had different ways of playing hopscotch. I watched her way and she watched mine; presently we came up with a brand new version of the game. Others soon joined us, and I found myself playing and laughing with kids whom I had thought I had nothing in common with. I have learned so much from Becca, but most of all I learned to not be afraid to build relationships with people who differ from me. Over the years, I have tried to live by this rule, and, as a result, have enjoyed many memorable and enriching relationships which have contributed to my desire to work with others in the practice of medicine.

One such relationship is with a woman named Jeanette. Our relationship began when I became Jeanette's reader through the Pittsburgh Vision Center, where I work as a volunteer. Before meeting Jeanette, I had never interacted with a blind person. At our first meeting, she was excited to tell me about the new computer she had just purchased and a movie that she had recently seen, making no reference to her blindness. I soon forgot that she was blind myself. "Did you see that blue jay that just landed on the tree outside?" I blurted. There was a moment of awkwardness, as I tried desperately to come up with a way to explain my thoughtlessness. Jeanette saved me by requesting that I describe the scene to her. As I did so, a smile appeared on her face, and she responded, "I see it now." Later, it occurred to me that just as Jeanette had benefited from my way of perceiving the world, I could benefit from her way of "seeing" as well. For example, I have jogged in the park for years, but until I relied on my other senses, I never realized how many animals were moving about or how many wonderful and horrible smelling plants there were! By looking at things from the other person's perspective, Jeanette and I can not enjoy a more complete picture of the world around us.

My desire to interact with people and understand their experiences and ideas

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actually stemmed from my early childhood exposures to people in a hospital setting. As I was growing up, my parents, both dedicated physicians, often took me to the hospital with them. Since I spent most of my time tagging along with my parent or the nurses, I had the opportunity to interact with many patients. All the different kinds of people fascinated me and I was curious to know who the patients were, what was wrong with them, and how they were being treated and cured. I always had a million questions to ask, and this desire to learn more about people and medicine has only increased over the years.

As a young adult, I was once again back at the hospital, shadowing medical professionals and asking questions. Through these visits, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of a career in medicine. I learned that a physician participates in many different relationships: with patients, with other physicians, with nurses, social workers, and other care-givers, as well as with hospital administrators and insurance carriers. Often, these relationships can be difficult to balance and sometimes it is even necessary to weigh one relationship against another. I came to this painful realization when I observed the treatment of a sick baby girl. The child desperately needed a heart transplant, and I was hopeful when the hospital found a match for her. Just a few days before her surgery, however, she contracted an intestinal infection. The little girl's physician decided that she was not strong enough to undergo surgery and felt that the valuable heart should be given to someone with a better change of survival. I stood by the baby girl's crib for a long time thinking, "I can't believe this is happening. How can he let her just die?" The unfairness of the doctor's decision stayed with me for along time, but I came to realize that he had to weigh his relationship with an individual patient against his duties to patients collectively and to society. Although it broke my heart to see that child lose her battle that day, I know that her doctor had probably saved another person's life. Unlike the relationships I have enjoyed with people like Jeanette, a physician's relationships are not always personally satisfying. However, these observations have not diminished my desire to become a physician. Rather, I've been encouraged to learn more about and better prepare myself for the different relationships involved in the health professions.

The ability to communicate clearly and concisely is the key to the success of a doctor's relationship with his/her patients. I am working on improving my communication skills through being a supplementary instructor (SI) and tutor. Tutoring introductory courses has sharpened my ability to present information

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effectively since I must reorganize and reword complex concepts into terms that beginning students can understand. As an SI, I also gained valuable communication skills through holding weekly summary sessions. My job as a tutor for international students has taught me important skills in communicating with non-native speakers.

As managed care plays a greater role in our health care system, the relationship between a physician and administrators is becoming increasingly complex. I am currently minoring in health care policy and management so that I will be able to make decisions that will optimize the benefits to the patients. I have also taken Health Psychology and Medicine and Society. These classes have helped me to better understand the relationships between mental health and physical health as well as social condition and the health care system.

Through my undergraduate research projects, I have also explored the relationship between biomedical research and patient care. My curiosity with how cells function combined with my desire to be academically challenged have led me to devote a notable amount of my college career to research. Since my freshmen year, I have conducted two independent research projects, which I had the opportunity to present at two school symposiums as well as a national meeting. One of my research projects looked at defects in the iron uptake process of Belgrade rats. Pinpointing the cause of these defects will increase the possibility of manufacturing drugs that will eventually help humans with iron deficiency diseases. In the long run, I hope to take advantage of my research background to conduct research projects that would have practical applications in patient care. From Becca to Jeanette, my relationships have enriched and educated me, and by observing and exploring the different relationships in health care, I have gained a more comprehensive view of medicine. I believe that what I have learned from the many people and experiences over the years will help me to become a successful physician - sensitive to my patients needs and aware of my responsibilities to science, society, and the health care system.

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