

# PERSONAL STATEMENT

Cindy Zhang

I practice yoga, guided by a teacher who steps into a handstand with an effortless breath with a decade of practice behind her. I climb walls beside people who scale heights like a walk in the park. I grant myself the grace to be a beginner today reassured it only takes a lifetime of effort when I notice graying hair.

We become masters through consistency. Age is no longer a limiting factor, rather an opportunity to accumulate. Our unique endeavors, from hobbies and careers to family, are commitments we embrace for a lifetime.

I began to see health as an active commitment when I navigated the health care system. Taking advantage of quick access to healthcare, I learned anatomy and spewed it back to the doctor. I became empowered to speak up for myself at the doctor's office by women who shared their experiences and emphasized long term effects. But quickly, I realized how healthcare did not serve me.

The priority was not keeping people healthy.

The cliché is that medicine is broken. But the issue is not in the science or knowledge of doctors, but rather the misalignment of incentives. Healthcare has been an institution of intervention, and the paradigm is simply becoming outdated.

Enabled by education and experiences, I see how access and computation can bring the promises of medicine to life, and I am acutely aware that many do not share my privileges. As I deepen my redefinition of health as commitment, I add another dimension: between myself and the community.

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In parallel, at my industry job, I received feedback that I demonstrated ambition by taking on big projects, but could spend more time on maintenance. Separately, I felt stifled when told that reaching out was not part of my job. Although kindly intended, the misalignment between what I had to give and what was desired frustrated me.

As I dealt with my misalignment, I recounted my time with Dr. Casey Overby Taylor's lab where I worked alongside doctorate students on translational problems. It seems over three years, I developed not just a skillset, but a research mindset— asking questions, seeking collective insights, and engineering solutions together.

So I reframed my frustration as an irresistible need to bring visions to life. My fire was fueled, and I leaped back to research.

**Pursuing a PhD is my chance to dedicate my life to an endeavor where I can make a genuine impact.** My endeavor is to transform medicine— so we can do what we love for as long as we can.

The spaces to pursue what we love are rare, and community and mentorship in these spaces transformed me. I am eager to give back to the realm that has shaped me the most: research.

To AIM, a landscape which embraces collective effort, I look forward to creating an environment to support everyone's vision and commitment, knowing firsthand the power of consistency. Together, we will drive the revolutionary changes we envision for the world.