

Use the space provided to explain why you want to go to medical school.

The dissected cadaver lay stone cold on the table with dead silence and an air of pungent formaldehyde. Never before was the contrast between what I saw on paper and in real life so striking. Contrary to a textbook's neatly organized depiction of physiology, I saw a convoluted mess of blood vessels, tissues, and organs - but a mess that had a uniquely intricate pattern of natural beauty. Beyond a seemingly chaotic appearance was a sophisticated bionetwork whose elements would have worked in perfect harmony to sustain a once living and breathing human being. I realized that what lay in front of me was not just a human body, but a thought provoking enigma whose complex framework cannot always be perfectly captured by a textbook - or even the mind for that matter.

As a researcher in the lab of Dr. X, the source of all my fascination is the complexity of a three pound organ that is the size of two fists – the human brain. Researching on ways to improve the efficacy of cerebral shunts used in treating hydrocephalus has given me the chance to apply engineering and neurobiology to address a debilitating disease that affects two in every one thousand newborns. My project goal is to design and build a physical model of the brain that can be used to bench test a shunt by simulating the intracranial pressure changes that would be observed in a real patient. Accounting for the safety and comfort of patients is an important part of my work, and it contributed to my interest in the world of clinical medicine that exists beyond the walls of a research lab.

My passion to learn more about disease from a clinical perspective led me to shadow physicians in order to learn more about what it means to be a doctor. Physician shadowing was a seminal experience for me. It exposed me to the “people side” of medicine and showed me that medicine is much more than simply diagnosing and treating diseases. One of my most poignant shadowing experiences was with Dr. X, a pediatrician at a local children's clinic. An unforgettably disturbing case that I witnessed there was that of a toddler who had suffered a traumatic head injury from child abuse. Dr. X specializes in treating victims of child abuse and neglect, and he did everything in his power, including enlisting help from local child rights and social work organizations, to ensure that this patient was in safe hands. I was deeply moved by his dedication to making sure that the child would be well protected and raised in a safe and friendly environment. His leadership and advocacy for the proper nurturing of children showed me that a doctor's duty is not only to treat, but also to reach out to his community and ensure that his or her patients lead safe and healthy lives. Shadowing Dr. X motivated me to connect with my own community; I now serve as an outreach volunteer at Xorg, a local community health center. As a volunteer, I help to increase awareness of the payment benefits that Xorg offers to uninsured and low income patients. Connecting with the underprivileged people in my community has made me value the service-oriented outlook that a doctor has toward his or her patients.

Shadowing Dr. X at Xlocation, made me realize the importance of empathy in the medical profession. Despite several hours of surgery, doctors were unable to prevent the fungal infection of a patient in his seventies from spreading into his brain; they concluded that his mortality was certain. I will never forget the experience of observing Dr. X give the news of this patient's inevitable death to his family. It was an emotionally wrenching experience to watch the family's reaction, a mix of sorrow and disbelief in the fact that they were going to lose a loved one. The incident reminded me of my own grandfather's death from cancer a year earlier, so at a deeper level I could understand the pain that they were experiencing. Dr. X approached the patient's family with remarkable compassion and expressed deep empathy for their loss. “Empathy is one of the most important qualities that a doctor must convey to his patients and those close to them,” he told me later. “It is really important to care for and connect with a patient at every level, for it shows a true commitment to the service involved in medicine.”

His words still resonate with me. After reflecting on them, I have chosen a clear purpose in pursuing a career in medicine. Through my shadowing and volunteering experiences, I learned that

being a doctor will not only give me the chance to treat patients, but also to reach out to them, educate them, and connect with them. My desire to go to medical school, which started out as a passion for biomedical research and a fascination with the complexity of human physiology, has evolved into an aspiration to provide the best possible healthcare through service and leadership. My experiences have led me to better understand the medical profession and have helped me confidently answer the question: *Why do I want to be a doctor?* I want to be a doctor so I can maintain the physical, social, and emotional well-being of my community, one patient at a time.