

PERSONAL STATEMENT WORKSHOP

SAMPLE #4

Every night, I rocked my baby sister to sleep, praying that the next phone call we received would be from our mom, and not from an officer telling us that she had died in Iraq. We never did receive that call from an officer, but we were lucky – some of our family friends did. Due to my military upbringing, I knew the risks associated with my decision to join the Army. Yet, the desire to save people, like my mom and the parents my friends lost, inspired me to pursue a medical career in the military. I recognized that one of the most significant steps in preventing the death of a soldier was at the point of injury, so I joined the Army Reserves as a combat medic. The experiences I gained as a result of joining the Army Reserves have helped further shape my motivation to become a physician.

My first mission took place on the Rocky Boy Native American reservation in Montana. While working as an EMT, we received a call for a man who was having a heart attack. When we arrived, he was sitting on his porch with a calm, unbothered, appearance. I asked the man if he was okay, but instead the paramedic replied “He’s used to them by now. This is his third heart attack in the past year”. My initial reaction was one of disbelief. Three heart attacks in a year is not something to simply be mentioned as an off-hand comment. After speaking with staff at the clinic, I was informed that there were several other people on the reservation who could not get the specialized care they needed. The nearest major hospital was 2 hours away, so specialized physicians rarely came to the reservation. Unfortunately, many patients also lacked the proper transportation to travel that distance and were often under-insured for the care they needed. Seeing as we were only on the reservation temporarily, I felt as though there was not much I could do to help them in the long-term. As a medic, the most I could do was provide basic care for the patients. I did not have the knowledge or experience necessary to provide them with the more advanced care a cardiologist, or pulmonologist, could provide. That feeling of wanting to do more, but being limited by knowledge and experience, is what motivated me to continue pursuing a career as a physician.

The following year, I joined another humanitarian mission; this time in El Salvador. My goal was to continue to put my medical knowledge and experience to good use, while also gaining more familiarity with patients whose culture differed from my own. On several occasions, I accompanied the physicians, dentist, and ophthalmologist who were sent to a specific site to provide care for the local population. By the end of each day, we would see anywhere from 800-1000 patients. We provided basic physical check-ups, dental care, eye exams, and medications. Yet, for so many people in this community, this was one of their only chances to receive this kind of care. I was shocked, because as I was conversing with patients I noticed that they faced similar healthcare barriers as the patients in Montana.

I was listening to a particular family talk about how their children often had to miss school, in order to work and help provide for the family, when the father began to sway back and forth. He appeared to be dizzy, so I sat the father down and asked him a series of questions to gain an idea of what may have caused him to feel this way. When he finished explaining his symptoms, I decided it was best to take him directly to one of our physicians. She determined that dehydration was the main factor that led to the father’s dizziness; however, the physician did notice some signs that the father may be diabetic as well. As a medic, I was limited in my knowledge and scope of practice, but I marveled at how meticulous the physician I shadowed was at gathering information on the father’s signs, symptoms, diet, and environment to see past the obvious signs of dehydration and discover a potential disease in its early stages. I have learned to recognize those same signs in future patients; however, I am not satisfied with just

knowing what may be wrong. I want to know that I have done everything possible to save the life of a patient, and I can only do that by providing the highest level of specialized care for my patients.

My pursuit of a career in medicine was initially inspired by the military, and my experiences on the reservation and in El Salvador have shown me a different perspective, where access to affordable and specialized care is a major area of concern for many patients. As an army medic, I am limited in the type of care I can provide for both soldiers and civilians; however, I plan to continue my service in the Army Reserves as a physician. This will provide me with the opportunity to balance my desire between treating soldiers like my mother and family friends, overseas on deployment, while also serving those in the most need of medical care stateside.