

Shadowing – An Imperative Experience for All Pre-Med Students

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There is a saying that claims that one can know every existing rule in the baseball rule-book, yet he or she does not truly know the game unless the individual attempts the game himself or herself. Likewise, a pre-med student is lacking that essential component unless he or she gets a firsthand experience in a clinic. To obtain this experience, students can bolster their stance as medical students through various ways, such as shadowing and volunteering. Here are some excerpts summarizing the shadowing experiences of two Lake Forest College students, Yama Naser Ahmad and Mona Sobhani.

Yama Naser Ahmad '10



Yama Nasar Ahmad (right), a Lake Forest Student, and Dr. John Alexander (left), a cardiothoracic surgeon at Evanston Northwestern Hospital.

A pre-med student is not complete as a student until he or she gets some firsthand clinical experience. This experience can be fulfilled in a variety of ways such as working or volunteering in a hospital. However, medical schools encourage all their applicants to solidify their interest in medicine through shadowing professional physicians in the area of their interest. Shadowing is an act of following and observing a medical doctor during a day-to-day clinical sitting. During this time, one can truly observe patient-physician interactions as well as develop an understanding of the physician's professional life. Perhaps through questioning the applicant may even learn how their particular doctor balances family, work, and friends.

A medical career has always been my life-long dream. I intend to direct my life towards the fulfillment of this goal not only because I find this career really interesting but

also due to the fact that there is a lack of medical doctors in developing countries, like Afghanistan. However, before going into a medical school, I needed to get a first-hand experience of a typical doctor's professional life. I have shadowed several doctors. During my freshman year of college, I shadowed Dr. John Alexander, a cardiothoracic surgeon at Evanston Northwestern Hospital. With Dr. Alexander, I had the privilege of observing aorta valve replacement and triple bi-pass surgeries, which I found thoroughly engaging and captivating. My experience with Dr. Alexander led me to pursue other doctors. I was curious to find out if I would be equally captivated by the medical career outside of the operating room. Subsequently, I shadowed Dr. Tom Kuzniar and Dr. Shashi Kiran Bellam, who are both pulmonary and critical care specialists at Glenbrook Hospital. My time with each of the doctors has taught me the proper etiquette and manners necessary during doctor-patient interactions. Plus, I learned how important it is to connect with patients from various cultural backgrounds. I saw patients who had difficulty expressing themselves in English. I believe, because I know various languages such as Russian, Dari (Farsi, or Persian), English, basic Hindi, basic Urdu, and basic Arabic, I would be able to help these patients. Shadowing really has solidified my decision to become a physician. I can now imagine myself doing the work as well as studying the subject.

Mona Sobhani '10



Mona Sobhani (middle) Volunteering at Kitatsato University School of Medicine in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan

Volunteering provides one with the opportunity to devote one's time, energy and compassion to others. During the volunteering experience, one will learn about others, society, and themselves. During the summer of 2007, I volunteered at Kitatsato University School of Medicine in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan. The University has two hospitals within the campus. The ER department within the hospital sponsored my stay for one month and I was able to experience on-site medical services as well as interact with medical students. Not only was it an interesting experience for medicine, but it was also a great cultural experience. I observed some differences in Japanese medical students compared to students who attend medical schools or who are currently pre-med students in America. There were differences among the physicians as well.

I mainly volunteered at a facility where they took care of physically disabled people. The first facility was right on campus since most of the patients were physically disabled by cerebral paralysis, cerebral hemorrhage, or head wounds. For the first two weeks, I helped the nurses and care takers with group activities and simple work. Each patient had different abilities depending on their conditions but some would help organize packages for corporate companies while others helped staple papers together. They would use any part of their body to make sure that whatever they were working on was successful. Observing these patients who worked so whole-heartedly without complaints touched my heart. At the end of the day, they would have smiles on their faces without showing signs of exhaustion.

Among many of the activities done with the patients were bowling, singing songs, playing volleyball etc. Nurses and other faculty members were creative with their games so that many patients could participate in their activities. Each patient expressed their gratitude and joy through different ways. Some would hold my hands tightly while others would look at me and smile. Those moments are so memorable to me that even today, I can picture the patients fully in my mind and I wonder how everyone is doing.

Every morning, some patients would be outside of the door waiting for me. They would call my name and say 'good morning'. Then at the end of the day, they would come out to the door to say good-bye and ask me what time I would be coming the next day. I was touched by these gestures and I had tears in my eyes every day. Even if it is hard for them to talk, to move their legs or arms, they do not take that as against them.

After the second week of my experience was completed, many of the patients were comfortable around me such that nurses allowed me to enter their living area. So for the rest of the two weeks, I was able to observe the patients' daily life. I helped them with their drinks, assisted them in using the bathroom, changing diapers, showering them, and drying their hair. It was a very different experience than the past two weeks. Since it was their daily life, some patients would become upset about something and would cry, yell, or run out of the area with their wheelchair and not listen to me. I learned how to approach each individual calmly with a big smile and to ensure them that I was on their side and that everything would be alright.

This one-month experience at Kitasato University School of Medicine is very difficult for me to express in words. I learned from the patients to never give up, always think optimistically, and even if you are in the most difficult situation and you do not see a light at the end of the tunnel, raise your head up and smile.

Shadowing and volunteering are crucial experiences for every pre-med student who intends to go to graduate school for medicine. These experiences allow one to either solidify her/his passion in medicine by learning about its everyday application in a clinical setting, or make one reevaluate her/his decision in pursuing medicine.

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