

Growing up as the daughter of a physician in our small town in South Dakota, I fell in love with the interpersonal aspect of medicine long before I knew anything about the science. “The art of medicine” is a subject most medical students don’t spend a lot of time studying, but it has been my fascination since I was a little girl. In my undergraduate program, I studied health communication and graduated with a degree in communication studies. I have conducted research on physician-patient communication, taken a medical improv course, and trained on delivering bad news.

Where I have seen “the art of medicine” distinctly, though, has been in my interactions with patients. On my first medical mission trip in the Dominican Republic, I learned that grace and kindness need no translation. I connected easily with the children I saw in clinic by simple smiles and games that required no words. In my visits to a homebound member of my community over the last two years, I have seen how sincere presence and a listening ear are often more than enough. In my inpatient medicine rotation, I connected with a patient who was dying of cancer. I learned much in my time spent with him about the fragility of life and the power of a meaningful conversation. It is easy for me to say that the thing I love most about medicine is combining the science and art of medicine to touch the lives of the patients I see in a meaningful way.

In my third year of medical school I found my passion and saw that combination of art and science come to life. I saw a patient with Merkel cell carcinoma and was fascinated by their presentation and pathology. I started finding myself drawn to every skin condition that walked into my family medicine and pediatric rotations. My first day with a dermatologist was a whirlwind. We started early in the morning and saw more patients than I thought could ever be seen in a day. I felt more energized during that day than any other clinic day I had experienced. I loved the fast pace and couldn’t help but feel like it perfectly matched my “always busy” personality. I was fascinated by the unique pathology we saw in every room and was surprised by the variety of procedures, diagnoses, and patient demographics.

One patient from that first day will always stick with me - a young college girl with alopecia areata. She had been receiving steroid injections in her scalp for several weeks and was finally starting to get her hair back. I saw the joy on her face and listened to her passionately thank the dermatologist for helping her regain her self-confidence. She was finally able to quit wearing the wig she had bought to cover up her disease. I was amazed that the physician had such a strong relationship with the patient and her family even in the midst of an extremely busy clinic day. I saw in that encounter what I have always wanted in medicine – having passion for my career, connecting with patients, and making a difference in the lives of others.

I am excited to continue my study of both the art and science of medicine in residency. My background and experiences have made me a good communicator, hard worker, and strong leader, which will serve me well as part of a residency team. I have received outstanding mentoring along my journey, and I want to continue that tradition in residency and my future career. It is my hope that I will be able to touch lives both in and out of medicine wherever I may land.