

Kimberly Whitehead

At an early age, I was introduced to the medical profession. At the age of eleven, I was diagnosed with a Wilm's tumor. At that point, I feared not only losing my kidney, but also my life, friends, and hair. For several years, I spent countless days in the hospital receiving chemotherapy, radiation, and blood transfusions. Obviously, through those years, I came in contact with many health professionals whom I admired and respected because I knew that they were responsible for saving my life. Those health professionals and my traumatic experience ignited my ongoing, undying interest to become a physician.

When I entered college, at first, I was indecisive about choosing a major. I had always dreamed of being a physician, but I decided against majoring in biology because I had feared that as a physician, I would become too empathetic toward my patients since I had experienced life as a patient for so many years. I decided to major in my second love, mathematics.

During my first two years of college at Hampton University, I earned many awards and a full tuition scholarship for my junior and senior years. During my last two years of college, I began to lose my enthusiasm for mathematics. It was then that I decided that I wanted to begin my quest to become a physician again. I neglected my original fears about becoming a physician, and I began to think more realistically. I realized that being empathetic towards patients could actually become an asset because I would be better able to interact with patients since I understood their pain and suffering; however, I would also keep in mind that I am only human and not a panacea.

Unfortunately, at the point at my decision, it was too late for me to change my major. Even more disheartening, I had many major medical setbacks such as: asthma, mononucleosis, chronic sinusitis, minor surgery to remove sutures, adhesions, gastrointestinal problems, and numerous bouts with the flu. Even though some time had passed from my last treatment, my immune system was still suppressed. Also, the only kidney that I had was affected by minimal change disease. Due to my stubbornness and foolish determination, I did not withdraw from the university as advised by faculty members, and as a result, my grades suffered.

After I had earned my degree from Hampton, I enrolled into Howard University in order to complete my pre-medical requirements. While at Howard, I was enrolled in a program called Med-Dent that allowed me the opportunity to observe surgeries. I also attended a summer medical program at the Medical College of Virginia. All of these experiences sparked my interest in medicine even more.

After diminishing my parent's savings, I realized that I had to begin working. I worked at the Howard University Cancer Center where I gained experience and knowledge regarding the

morbidity and mortality of cancer among African-Americans. I developed a national, comprehensive survey to assess African-Americans' knowledge of cancer. I also assisted in a free breast cancer and cervical cancer screening clinic.

While enjoying my work experience, I decided to improve my chances of becoming a medical school candidate by entering graduate school. I completed my Master of Public Health degree from the Medical College of Virginia in one year. Unfortunately, the degree didn't compensate for my undergraduate grades. I was rejected from several medical schools.

After my rejection letters, I worked as a health educator for several years with organizations such as the Baptist General Convention of Virginia, Planned Parenthood, the Virginia Department of Health, and the United Network for Organ Sharing. Additionally, I served in AmeriCorps for two years, volunteered at a local hospital, and served as a mentor and tutor.

Last year, I finally decided not to let previous rejections and fear of other medical setbacks keep me from pursuing my dream. I decided against retaking the MCAT and applied to foreign medical schools. I am now a student at Spartan Health Sciences University. The school is fully accredited and allows students to complete their clinical years in the United States.

All of my financial support is through the U.S. Federal Stafford Loan Program and through Sallie Mae Signature Loans. Needless to say, I am going to owe a fortune by the time I graduate. Hopefully, I will be able to reduce some of my debt through a loan forgiveness program. A scholarship would also be a blessing.

Being from a rural, poverty-stricken area, it has always bothered me to see that there is an alarming shortage of primary care physicians in rural, low-income areas; therefore, I want to work in an underserved community and as a primary care physician. I believe that I could become a powerful, influential instrument as a physician with an added Master of Public Health degree. Not only will I have the medical training, but also extensive training in prevention strategies. Through my personal experiences, I feel that I have a drive for a career in medicine that many others do not possess; I am determined to help others so that no one else has to suffer as I did.