

Bette was barely 2-years-old when she arrived at my orphanage in Ethiopia. Profoundly malnourished and suffering from a host of opportunistic infections complicating her HIV, it seemed, in many ways, incredible that she was even alive. As I sat in a crowded room, holding this weak and feverish child in my arms for hours on end and willing her to live despite the odds, I remember thinking about the myriad of challenges she was going to face in her young life. From a medical perspective, she would always struggle with gaining access to even the most basic of medications, let alone the antiretroviral drugs that would be essential to her health for many years to come. In addition, she would also have to fight a constant battle against the rampant social stigma of HIV/AIDS throughout Ethiopia, and likely be required to depend on charitable organizations like our orphanage for much of her livelihood. Even if she could fend off this latest infection, she was still facing a difficult road ahead without many tools at her disposal to overcome the obstacles she would surely encounter. I developed, in that moment, a strong determination to do something – anything – to help change her life for the better. And, in that moment, it became clear that a career in family medicine, with an emphasis on care for the underserved, academics and patient care, would give me the opportunity to spend my life working to help and advocate for patients like Bette.

After having seen firsthand the vast inequalities plaguing places like Ethiopia, in addition to the staggering imbalances in health care we often see in the United States, I knew that my calling in medicine would always be to work with underserved patient populations. Being in the places where physicians are needed the most, ensuring access to care, and advocating for patients who do not always have a voice ignites my passion and fuels my desire to provide strong, compassionate care. Family medicine, more than any other specialty, will prepare me to work in underserved communities and allow me to gain a breadth and depth of experience not only in comprehensive patient care, but also in dealing with the unique challenges that arise in resource-poor settings.

I respect and value the focus on community service that is inherent in family medicine, as well. Volunteerism has always been an important part of my life, and I have been fortunate to serve in several incredible organizations. My current passion lies with AHOPE for Children, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving orphans with HIV/AIDS for which I am a member of the board of directors. Being a part of AHOPE has not only allowed me to channel my passion for global health into real action on a day-to-day basis, but also has taught me a great deal about the inner workings of a nonprofit board and its dependent organization. I hope to continue to keep community service a focus of my future career, and I know that family medicine will only further my ability and desire to remain an active and dedicated member of the communities – both local and global – to which I belong.

Through a career in family medicine, I also hope to continue to focus on academic excellence and further education. As a lifelong learner, I thrive on the pursuit of knowledge and enjoy the dizzying rate of change that is inherent in our profession. I enjoy not only pushing myself to succeed, but helping others to do so as well. In medical school, I created and led a year-long USMLE Step 1 preparation course with another student. The experience showed me just how much I enjoy teaching and the unique process by which we transfer knowledge in medicine, and I plan to stay involved in academic medicine throughout my career. I also pursued a master of public health degree in addition to my medical school studies, to further develop my knowledge and skills and to continue to build my academic foundation. Family medicine is certainly an academically rigorous specialty, and that is one of the aspects I love most about it. The span of patients and disease processes that we have the potential to see and treat is incredibly wide and diverse, and the scope of practice in family medicine is constrained only by each physician's desire to learn more and delve deeper into a particular area. For example, I have a strong interest in women's health, and family medicine will allow me to further develop my knowledge and skills in that area while not requiring me to give up the other aspects of medicine that I also enjoy. Family medicine requires a strong commitment to the continued and daily pursuit of learning, and I am excited to be able to incorporate my love of academics into my future career.

While family medicine will allow me to work with underserved populations and remain committed to academics and education, its greatest draw for me lies in its tireless dedication to patient care. With its inherent variety, strong patient relationships and focus on humanism in medicine, family medicine is ultimately a specialty that puts the patient first. For me, the most meaningful moments in medicine come from interactions with patients, and the best parts of my day are often those times when I am able to spend an extra few minutes chatting with them. I am always amazed and humbled by how much insight and perspective I gain from talking with patients about their

illnesses. They are certainly our greatest teachers, and I respect and appreciate so much the time they spend with me as a medical student. Because of the trust and responsibility inherent in the physician-patient relationship, I feel strongly that all patient interactions should be guided by humanism. As a member of the student core group for the Humanism in Medicine initiative and co-chair of the Gold Humanism Honor Society, I work to keep a strong focus on patient care in all of my daily activities. These groups help to foster an atmosphere that exemplifies integrity, excellence, compassion, altruism, respect, empathy and service at our institution, and I know that these essential principles will continue to guide my practice of medicine in the future.

Family medicine is a specialty that encompasses everything that is truly great about medicine, and it will allow me to continue to pursue my passions of care for underserved populations, academics and patient care. I love the challenges of family medicine, from the breadth of knowledge required to be able to see all patients, no matter their age, gender or particular problem, to the teaching and communications skills that are necessary to help patients become partners in their own medical care. I also love the rewards of family medicine – the joy that comes from treating a mother throughout her pregnancy, delivering the child and then taking care of that child as he or she grows up; the intellectual excitement that is inherent in keeping up-to-date with the latest advances in medical care, solving diagnostic puzzles and thinking through complex patient presentations; and the great responsibility of being able to truly help people when they are at their most vulnerable. Most of all, I love the ideals embodied in family medicine. Its focus on humanism and compassion, patient advocacy and teamwork, integrating psychosocial aspects of patients' lives into their medical care, and building strong relationships with patients and their families is important to me, and fits well with my own personal values. I look forward to the many opportunities that lay ahead of me in family medicine, and I am honored by the opportunity to pursue a career in this specialty that I have grown to love so much.