

A haze settles on the field, created from a mix of humid summer air and field lights. With every muscle sore and fatigued, you step up to the line of scrimmage and scan the offensive team for signs of exhaustion and self-doubt. The challenger steps forward and eyes lock. You get into a solid three point stance. Feet are firmly planted with weight slightly shifted on your fingertips. A final glance at the opponent sends a message of self-confidence and purpose. The clamor of the crowd fades and eyes fixate on the ball. The play begins and within a split second an explosion occurs, you have past the first opponent and move on to the next. The goal is close and then the whistle blows. The sound of the crowd returns and the boisterous announcer declares, "the quarterback was sacked in the backfield, resulting in negative yardage for the offense." An unavoidable grin appears and you think, "mission accomplished." Holding dual roles as a medical student and defensive end for an all female tackle football team refined my interest for family medicine. A family physician also uses comprehensive awareness to initiate reaction and execution.

Both roles function as the first line of defense and use awareness to implement prevention. Awareness starts with expansive knowledge. During practices and games, having first access to acutely injured players ignited a brief adrenaline rush. But as the season progressed, my skills were utilized frequently on various topics. Teammates had questions ranging from coping strategies to clarification of a disease process. The excitement of medicine shifted from acute specialized care to total care. For me, the pleasure of comprehensive knowledge and awareness has a longer half-life than the thrill of acute injuries. Although I hope to specialize in sports medicine, I appreciate the breadth of medicine and want to apply it daily. Athletes are more than a sport, just as patients are more than a disease. Family medicine provides the best preparation to care for the entire athlete and patient.

In medicine, primary care physicians develop an armory of knowledge accompanied by an enormous duty to respond to patients and the community. The opportunity lasts a moment and is specifically crafted for each patient. Regardless of whether or not recommendations are followed, primary care physicians respond with consistent excellence and compassion. Patient education can instill awareness and cause them to react to their illness. Like the domino effect, educating one patient can make a difference in the community. Reaction also includes knowing when to take time for you. Participating in non-medical extracurricular activities helped me balance the rigors of school. I gained a different perspective about medicine and the community that challenged my goals. Family medicine reacts to individual patients, the community and to self.

Health care delivery is measured by the execution of comprehensive knowledge and rapid response. Execution cannot develop without its two predecessors. It takes practice to develop consistency and over time will prompt refinement. There is no fan fair, just satisfaction in being part of a team. Execution also involves knowing when to trust other members of that team. Unfortunately, an opponent may gain yardage and illnesses may progress. Coordinating patient care is a team effort and allows all participants to work effectively to ultimately benefit the patient.

Through football and medicine, I have discovered that it takes awareness, reaction and execution to excel. During residency, putting this technique into practice will be a daily task. It will continuously be refined by experiences, lessons and guidance. Being open-minded to change and daily learning will be a priority throughout residency. Each patient encounter will be an opportunity to gain knowledge and explore different perspectives. This year it was a great honor to be selected by the Women's Football Alliance as a Second Team All-American Defensive End. I play because I love every play and, like medicine, I love learning from every case.