

The rift between direct human service and demanding intellectual challenge is a growing divide in most medical endeavors. Rigorous scientific research is at times staged far from those subjects it aims to benefit, while practitioners themselves yearn for the intellectual challenge that sometimes might not be provided by the routine of examining patients. As a Public Health student and burgeoning dental health professional, my collective experiences have cultivated both my capacity and passion to better lives and further the cause of humanity, yet my research-oriented specialization has left me alienated from direct interaction with patients. Dentistry not only bridges that vocational divide, but intertwines human interaction with technical professionalism. My interest in science, intellectual rigor and passion for helping people, makes dentistry my ideal career.

Too often, my academic medical endeavors fell short of satisfying my desire to directly help individuals. As a student at UCLA, my rigorous research into Parkinson's disease and brain tumors challenged me analytically, yet seldom exposed me to those afflicted. I felt that my contribution was mostly theoretical and I naturally craved opportunities that exposed me directly to patients. These studies on campus, however, coincided with my experience at home, where my father had long endured his battles with Multiple Sclerosis. Although I understood the physiology of his affliction, I lacked the practical skills to tend to, and alleviate his pain. This was not only disempowering, yet quite revealing: thoroughly exposing my desire to pursue a profession that bridged intellectual mastery and challenge, with a practical capacity to cure. Therefore, I took on extracurricular responsibilities premised on practice, providing logistical coordination for UCLA's Mobile Clinic and translation services for health care providers at UCLA Hospital. These activities allowed me to be more involved technically, yet I was still an intermediary and hence distant from those patients I yearned to serve directly. I was left feeling unable, both at school and at home, to help those in dire need of care and medical attention.

I recalled my experience serving as a Dental Assistant at a dental clinic in Torrance, where I was actively tending to patients and fluidly engaged with the dentist's daily tasks, and resolved that dentistry offered not only the challenge and undeniable sense of contribution, but also a daily opportunity to directly help individuals. Furthermore, dentistry ideally harmonizes my strong interest in medicine, engineering and art, as it is truly a profession that encompasses them all. Combined with its inherent emphasis on human interaction and direct service, dentistry also requires creative ingenuity and technical malleability given that every patient differs in dental structure. Furthermore, this specificity requires both a keen attention to detail and an unwavering sensitivity to

individual dental problems, which guarantees a new challenge with every patient. Thus, instead of examining an affliction or an epidemic *a priori*, dentistry demands both analytical preparation and direct engagement with patients. This offers the professional bridge I require, while also nourishing my commitment to humanity and community service.

In many communities in the United States, dental care and awareness is considered anything but commonplace. Rather, it has become an inaccessible luxury for too many Americans, who lack even the most basic awareness of routine care and prevention methods. As an immigrant myself, I am intimately aware of the lack of access indigents and communities of color have to regular and adequate dental care. The United States' prevailing insurance regime leaves over one-half of its citizenry financially unable to receive regular dental attention, which severely compromises cavity and disease prevention and ultimately hinders their aggregate quality of life. My pursuits as a Public Health student have cultivated both my desire and ability to engage in philanthropic dental campaigns to assist these marginalized Americans, a commitment I will surely continue as a dental student, dentist, and beyond. I plan to offer dental educational seminars and care in my community, and am interested in forming professional collectives bringing together socially conscious dentists committed to the same objectives. Adequate dental care should not be considered a luxury, but a human right that is extended to Americans regardless of their socioeconomic standing. This very commitment, coupled with my aggregate interest in dentistry, only amplifies my desire to become a dentist.

Dentistry is far more than a profession, but something that I am deeply passionate because it will allow me to positively impact lives on a daily and direct basis. Its' inherent philanthropy and propensity to directly cure pain and better lives, only affirms my desire to join its ranks. I recall, quite vividly, my family's melancholy journey from Iran to California well over a decade ago, glancing over at my father's weakened body and vulnerable visage as we boarded the plane. I was only a child but I appreciated the magnitude of the pain he suffered, which malignantly spread into concern on my brother's, and mother's, minds. At that instant, I promised myself to pursue a life committed to human service and the active ability to cure such pain. This passion and commitment, merged with my personal talents and intellectual interest, lead me directly to a dentistry school.