

Sample Essay 2
Written for Matriculation in 2010

I first met Mrs. W while she was still in a wheelchair. She was wearing a bright spring dress, but the pretty floral print only accentuated her grim expression and the bruises that covered her arms from repeated hospitalizations. She had been referred to the clinical research center, where I volunteered as a high school senior, to enroll in a clinical trial to treat her incapacitating low serum sodium. Even though she was in her mid-eighties and had a rudimentary right hand since birth with undeveloped digits, she had been quite independent until her low serum sodium resulted in significant confusion and some falls. Conventional treatments for this problem had failed to produce lasting results, and restrained hope for new treatment was writ on her face as she entered the clinic. My next encounter with Mrs. W was a few months later. This time, there was no wheelchair. She strode into the research office with a beaming smile and a shopping bag in her left hand. She proudly removed two hand-knitted Afghans.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 4:55 PM

Comment: A good opening vignette. However, it refers to a high school experience and I would have liked to see the opening paragraph reflect a more recent experience.

"These are for the doctor and nurse," she said "I knitted them." I was dumbfounded. I could not help but glance at her right hand. It was still hypoplastic, but the drug had changed everything else. I saw firsthand how the compassionate care of the staff and the miracle of modern medicine had transformed the life and outlook of a patient. I was hooked.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 4:58 PM

Comment: Good transition to second paragraph and statement of "why I want to pursue medicine". "I was hooked."

In college, I seized the earliest opportunity to enter pharmacology research; the transition from research in the lab to trials in patients intrigued me. My most exciting lab experience has been the one related to the insulin receptor signal transduction pathway. I am using a western blot approach to develop a novel assay that quantifies the potency of nitric oxide as a potential therapy for Type II diabetes. While I realize that it is a long way from cellular-level experiments to trials in patients, my research has inculcated in me the discipline and respect for the scientific process that is necessary to take the first step in this direction.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 4:59 PM

Comment: Essay transitions into a research description and "lessons learned". Always consider what lessons you have learned from this experience and how it has advanced you toward medicine.

I also began learning about the mental agility required to fathom the far-reaching scope of medicine as a freshman in Duke's Global Health FOCUS program. I went to Costa Rica to study their nationalized healthcare system and collaborated with an international consulting firm on a retrospective in-depth policy analysis of their response plan to the health staff crisis in Malawi. Closer to home, I implemented strategies discussed in the classroom to strengthen the information infrastructure for a prescription assistance program at a community clinic that services the swelling ranks of the working uninsured in my rural Tennessee hometown. Through these experiences, I witnessed how the lack of healthcare devastates families both domestically and abroad. My desire to become a doctor deepened in hopes that I could serve people in their time of greatest need.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 5:02 PM

Comment: Notice the number of action verbs in this paragraph. "Collaborated", "implemented", "witnessed". The paragraph also contains lessons learned and insights gained.

During my sophomore year, a fellow Duke student passed away after collapsing during an intramural basketball game. This tragedy brought back painful memories of a similar incident in high school when a talented wrestler passed away during school practice. I felt that should another such event occur, my fellow students and I were largely unprepared. So, after becoming CPR certified and trained as a Red Cross instructor, I launched a campus-wide initiative to increase CPR/AED and First Aid training. With the goal of reaching every undergraduate, I secured funding to offer free courses on campus.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 5:03 PM

Comment: This student saw a need and did something about it. Going beyond wanting to be a doctor to actually doing something of importance for the community.

I was acutely aware that such an endeavor required more than one's personal best, it required a collective effort. Towards that end, I galvanized a critical mass of student volunteer instructors and began developing the first mass CPR training model designed for college campuses in the nation. We campaigned diligently to raise awareness and make the courses more accessible by holding CPR training competitions and bringing courses to

students in their dorms and common meeting places. Our campus went from holding a handful of courses per semester to multiple per week, resulting in a more than five-fold increase in certifications thus far.

I also spearheaded an AED installation campaign and a Durham outreach program that offers free Red Cross courses to underprivileged residents in Durham. To our joy, these community classes are always over-booked, and we have been able to recruit Spanish-speaking students to help us offer courses in Spanish on a regular basis. It has been humbling for me to be at the receiving end of an outpouring of support and participation from the community, and I have been preparing other students to help continue and spread this initiative to other college campuses when I graduate. My transformation from a bystander to a strong link in the Chain of Survival has been a life changing experience. The success of my initiatives as the Chair of Duke Red Cross's Health & Safety Committee for two successive terms has proven my capacity to be a good team player as well as a leader, and my strong work ethic has consistently earned me a place on the Dean's List with Distinction. I feel that my demonstrated passion to implement what I have learned and my desire to help those in need make me a strong candidate for medical school.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 5:05 PM

Comment: Good concluding paragraph. It reiterates her accomplishments and ties them to the medical field and why she is ready for medical school.