

Medical School Personal Statement Example

On the first day that I walked into the Church Nursing Home, I was unsure of what to expect. A jumble of questions ran through my mind simultaneously: Is this the right job for me? Will I be capable of aiding the elderly residents? Will I enjoy what I do? A couple of hours later, these questions were largely forgotten as I slowly cut chicken pieces and fed them to Frau Meyer. Soon afterwards, I was strolling through the garden with Herr Schmidt, listening to him tell of his tour of duty in World War II. By the end of the day, I realized how much I enjoyed the whole experience and at the same time smiled at the irony of it all. I needed to travel to Heidelberg, Germany to confirm my interest in clinical medicine.

Experiences like my volunteer work in the German nursing home illustrate the decisive role that travel has played in my life. For instance, I had volunteered at a local hospital in New York but was not satisfied. With virtually no patient contact, my exposure to clinical medicine in this setting was unenlightening and uninspiring. However, in Heidelberg, despite the fact that I frequently changed diapers for the incontinent and dealt with occasionally cantankerous elderly, I loved my twice-weekly visits to the nursing home. There, I felt that I was needed and wanted. That rewarding feeling of fulfillment attracts me to the practice of medicine.

My year abroad in Germany also enriched and diversified my experience with research. Although I had a tremendously valuable exposure to research as a summer intern investigating chemotherapeutic resistance in human carcinomas, I found disconcerting the constant cost-benefit analysis required in applied biomedical research. In contrast, my work at the University of Heidelberg gave me a broader view of basic research and demonstrated how it can expand knowledge -- even without the promise of immediate profit. I am currently attempting to characterize the role of an enzyme during neural development. Even though the benefit of such research is not yet apparent, it will ultimately contribute to a vast body of information.

My different reactions to research and medicine just exemplify the intrinsically broadening impact of travel. For example, on a recent trip to Egypt I visited a small village on the banks of the Nile. This impoverished hamlet boasted a large textile factory in its center where many children worked in clean, bright, and cheerful conditions weaving carpets and rugs. After a discussion with the foreman of the plant, I discovered that the children of the village learned trades at a young age to prepare them to enter the job market and to support their families. If I had just heard about this factory, I would have recoiled in horror with visions of sweatshops

running through my head. However, watching the skill and precision each child displayed, in addition to his or her endless creativity, soon made me realize that it is impossible to judge this country's attempts to deal with its poverty using American standards and experience. I hope to apply this nonjudgmental stance to patients in my future medical career, making sure to take a patient's background and perspectives into mind when advising them on their health. Although I would be a medical professional offering credible advice about how to improve or treat a patient's health condition, I vow to focus on treating the holistic individual, including their values and beliefs – even if they are different from my own. Further, I believe having had many diverse travel experiences, like the one in Egypt, have allowed me to broaden my own understanding of how others lead their lives.

Travel has not only had a formative and decisive impact on my decision to pursue a career in medicine; it has also broadened my horizons -- whether in a prosperous city on the Rhine or an impoverished village on the Nile. In dealing with patients or addressing research puzzles, I intend to bring the inquiring mind fostered in school, lab, and volunteer experiences. But above all, I intend to bring the open mind formed through travel.¹
