

Personal Statement

After getting back home to start my summer break in elementary school, I can still remember the disbelief on my face when my parents told me that they would be leaving for India for two weeks without me. Rather than based on some misbehavior on my part, however, I soon learned that they were leaving because of a promise many years ago. A few weeks after being born, I had increasing problems breathing and eventually was rushed to the hospital. My parents both turned to prayer to deal with the difficulties and vowed that if I made it that they would make a 60 mile religious trek in India. Luckily, after a gamut of tests, the physicians were able to make a diagnosis. While having this conversation, my father began to break down in tears; it was the first time I had ever seen him so emotional in my life.

Often times, it takes one's own adverse experiences or those of his loved ones to really change his worldview and perspective. Beforehand, I had not realized how fortunate I was to have had great medical as well as personal care. That day opened my eyes to how I wanted to devote my life to medicine to hopefully leave the world a better place. Given the story of my own parents, I have always felt that a career in pediatrics would enable me to do so in a meaningful way. Children provide the world with a refreshing perspective as they have a positive outlook even in difficult times, and to lose that perspective and lightness, especially for the family involved, is something that I cannot even imagine.

Prior to my arrival at Duke University, I was quite set on a career solely as a practicing physician. I had always envisioned myself in an office setting where the impact I was having in my community would be more tangible. In talking with my own pediatrician, he stated that the doctor-patient relationships that were built over the years were quite rewarding. However, he stated that he often felt somewhat helpless as some of his patients presented with diseases which provided few options for effective treatment. Looking back at his career, he wished he had committed himself to research to provide medical professionals with better options given the frustrating experiences endured by the physician and, more importantly, the family involved.

After giving this some thought, I realized that to really change the outcomes of such situations would be by contributing to efforts to finding novel therapies. I plan on applying to medical schools this upcoming summer for M.D. programs and hope later on in life to be involved in translational or clinical research in addition to being a clinician. I was drawn to DIPG and Dr. Becher's lab given the lack of treatments available despite the huge advances made in our understanding of cancer over the past decade. Working in Dr. Becher's lab has given me the opportunity to see translational research firsthand and how researchers go about moving treatments move from the bench to bedside. It has also opened my eyes to how vital research is to the lives of many individuals and families facing diseases that have presented a puzzle to physicians for many years. However, I think great advances will be made in the next few years and I definitely hope to in some way contribute to such findings.

With regards to prior research experience, I have worked for the past year in Dr. Becher's lab and recently presented my findings at the 2013 American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Undergraduate Student Caucus and Poster Competition, where I was awarded the Gary J. Miller 3rd Prize for Undergraduate Research in Cancer and Cancer-Related Biomedical Sciences. I plan on continuing to work in Dr. Becher's lab for as long as is necessary to hopefully be able to see my project through and see the proposed treatment move to clinical trial. My goal is to graduate from Duke knowing that my work really helped to make a difference in finding a cure for DIPG and hopefully acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the field in the near future.

Thank you for your consideration,

Raj Singh