

Pursuing a career in medicine has been my passion since I was five. Whenever I was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I'd reply, confidently and without hesitation, "A doctor." At that age, of course, I was not aware of the different pathways one could choose when practicing medicine. As I grew older my passion never changed, but the path I wanted to take became clearer. I remember the specific day I decided to pursue a practice in dentistry. It was the summer before my freshman year of high school when I went for a routine teeth cleaning at my dentist's office. Unlike most children, I loved the dentist's office. Our dentist is a family friend who always made each visit comical-- although this particular day was different. On this day, I had a serious conversation with him. He came into the room with a big smile and his usual corksy sense of humor, sat down and began to make small talk. "How are you doing? Are you excited to start school in the fall?" Like anyone who has known me for quite some time, he asked, "Are you still planning on being a doctor?" As usual, my response was an automatic "Yes, of course." He then asked, "Have you ever thought about dentistry?" I hesitated before answering, "No, I have not narrowed down what type of doctor I want to be yet." The reply my dentist spoke were words that would change my entire perspective on dentistry, and made me eager to pursue it as my dream. "Well, let me just tell you this," he said. "Of course I like working the hours I do, and receiving the money I make, but the best part about my job is the ability to give someone a smile that they are proud of-- because what is happiness without a smile?" His words lingered with me. I considered what a simple smile does for a person in day-to-day life. This accelerated my passions both for my career in medicine and my eagerness to help others in need.

Serving others, and giving back to the community, has always been part of my lifestyle. Being raised by parents, who took generosity to the next level, had an enormous influence on me. If you have the ability to help, whether by giving knowledge, wealth, or time, it is the right thing to do and also brings the most joy out of life. My father is heavily involved in the Lions Club and, from the age of four, I have had an active role in his local chapter. However, my real passion for service began as a freshman in high school. It was then that I learned one person could truly make a difference. My father is a contributor to a local cancer foundation called Angel's of Hope, which is an organization that assists families of children battling cancer, and relieves them of their financial burdens. The Angels of Hope annual charity gala coincidentally took place a few weeks after I had my inspirational conversation with my dentist. At the event there were many speakers and donors who spoke about how their contributions impacted the organization through donations of time and money. One speaker, in particular, caught my attention. He was a dentist who donated services of free dental work to children and their families until they were financially stable again and able to regain dental care on their own. Upon hearing this, I knew from that moment on that I would be a dentist. My mind started racing, and I couldn't stop thinking of the different ways I can one day contribute, as a dentist.

College and grades

As years passed, my passion for dentistry grew as I became involved in shadowing, research, and growth in my education on what the field was all about. As

I finished up my senior year of undergrad and after years of shadowing, I thought that I had a well-rounded understanding of how a dentist can change someone's life. I was wrong, but I would soon enough truly grasp it.

About a month ago, my parents called me home from school for the weekend because they needed to tell me something important. Reluctant, due to the fact I needed to be focused on studying for my DAT, I made the quick trip back to my hometown. They both sat me down and said, "Kaylee, I know you have a lot on your plate right now, but there is something we need to tell you." As my father began to speak, I could see my mom's eye begin to water. He said, "Last week I was diagnosed stage 4 throat cancer." The room was silent, but my mind was racing with questions. Hardly being able to speak I asked, "How did you find it?" He looked at me with a half heart smile and said, "My dentist." Before I could ask another question he said, "I went in to get a cap fixed on my tooth and said he said, Ray there is something on the back of your throat and you need to go and have it looked at because I think it's cancerous." Still in shock, I continued to let him talk, "I went to my physician the next week, and he said he could not feel anything or see anything but due to how adamant my dentist was, he would send in a referral to see an oncologist." The oncologist located the mass, biopsied it and waited for the results to confirm that it was indeed cancerous. The cancer was not only a mass on his epiglottis, but it also spread to two of his adjacent lymph nodes. Stunned by the diagnosis, the oncologist said that it has not spread any further and to be thankful your dentist caught the cancer before metastasized any further.

As he consoled me he said, "Take this as a learning experience, for when you become a dentist, always be as thorough, as persistent, and as knowledgeable as you can be so your patients will be as grateful for you as I am for my dentist.

As we prepare for a rough next few months, I cannot help but to be thankful for our dentist every time I look at my father. It is a constant reminder of the reason I became so passionate for the field in the first place and now eight years after the Angel's of Hope gala, I am also able to fully grasp the type gratitude that the family had for their dentist

I will be forever grateful for this profession and my passion was fueled even greater having been personally effected by the life. Not only will I be able to brighten a smile, I also can save ones life. The practice of Dentistry will forever have personally changed my life and I am now ready to change others. I was, and remain, absolutely certain, that this is the correct career choice for me.

Talk about thorough, intelligence, and expertise

If it wasn't for how thorough, his persistence , and knowledgeability the cancer would have spread further throughout my body making it harder for me to fight this.