

Medical School and Healthcare : After

To many people, the field of dentistry involves preventing and relieving tooth decay and periodontal disease. To me, it is very personal. Unfortunately, of all of the healthcare fields, dental care has the greatest disparity in services based on socio-economic status. In developing countries like my native Taiwan, access to dental care is unaffordable to the majority of the population. While even poor countries around the world attempt to provide basic medical care – dentistry is often considered a luxury. I would like to dedicate my professional career to changing this situation.

Interestingly, in the United States, dentistry has trended toward cosmetic dentistry – whether it is whitening your teeth, or creating a perfect smile. This is not true in Taiwan. Dentistry is less about vanity, and more about public health, preventing further oral cavity problems, and enabling people to completing basic life functions like eating. It was not until I was in college that I realized one of my father's most valuable possessions was a removable partial denture for one of his maxillary central incisors. Dentures are very expensive, and not only fill gaps and improve appearance, but help with chewing.

Part of my passion for this field developed due to the basic fact that my family was incapable of paying for my dental care. Dentists were extremely costly to my family because the system of dental insurance was imperfect and unfair. I grew up thinking dental care was a privilege for wealthy people, and vowed that I would one day make it more accessible to poorer areas of the country.

While I care about dentistry from a public policy perspective, I also am fascinated by the functioning of gums and teeth, and the technical challenges of diagnoses, prevention and treatment. When I was in third grade, my father was involved in a motorbike accident that caused his maxillary central incisors to turn dark purple. I was curious as to why this occurred, and how to ameliorate this problem. My father was fortunate to be able to see a dentist – who offered a simple solution: remove the tooth. Unfortunately, our dental coverage did not cover surgery, and considering an advanced technique like a root canal was out of the question.

While diagnosis and treatment are important, my native country also suffers from a lack of education about proper dental care. When I was young, my deciduous teeth began to become loose. I found it amusing to pull out all of my teeth. While this seemed like an innocent activity performed by a child, it was not until years later that I realized that this created improper alignment of my permanent teeth.

My family experiences have taught me a personal lesson on the importance of proper dental care, and given me the ambition to dedicate my professional career to this field, and in helping others. The cost of dental care is still prohibitively high throughout my country, and I realize that I cannot fix the healthcare delivery system. However, I am confident that I can effectuate change by participating in a non-profit organization in a local community and providing free dental work to homeless and low-income patients periodically. It would allow me to offer help to those who have suffered from oral pain and costly dental care.

To learn more about the dental profession, I volunteered in a dental office. I am qualified to help dental assistants clean the operating room after treatment, and deliver dental instruments for the primary dentist. This experience has taught me the importance of cleanliness and sanitization in the operating room. It also allowed me an opportunity to closely observe how different dentists, including general dentists, orthodontists, and endodontists treat patients. I realized that dentistry is more than simply a science – it also involves teamwork and effective interpersonal skills.

To improve my communication skills, I have volunteered for a wide variety of opportunities in my community. I have volunteered for two years at *****, and been a supermarket cashier, as well as a teaching assistant for an after-school program. These diverse experiences allowed me to interact with people of different ages, and socio-economic backgrounds. I have learned that sometimes empathy, not science, is the best way to help clients.

I am confident I can succeed in dentistry school, as I am committed, and diligent. I had to overcome several obstacles both academic and cultural to achieve my bachelor's degree from the Department of Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology. Since my native language is Mandarin Chinese, I have worked to overcome the language barrier, and greatly improved my English abilities while studying at ****. My part-time jobs did more than pay for my textbooks and daily expenses – it helped me understand American culture and glean more information from my studies.

I recognize that an advanced education in dentistry will do more than broaden my horizons, it will help me realize my dream of providing dental care to families like mine. My volunteer experiences at *****, combined with my “dentist shadowing,” have confirmed my career choice, and given me the ambition to move onto the next stage of my studies.

