



A Premed's Story: Not all paths are straightforward

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Hello Everyone!

In this blurb I'm going to (hopefully) disclose a little bit about some of my experiences that led to the decision of pursuing medicine. It'll be a little long-winded and erratic, so please bear with me! I hope that hearing my journey helps reaffirm the hopes of other students like me!

Some background information:

I was born and raised in Montreal, QC. When I was in cegep (a transitional schooling period between high school and university studies), I discovered my passion for psychology. I decided to cater my studies with these kinds of courses and pave the path to continue my journey in university. However, upon entering university, a lot of things changed for me.

During the two years that I spent in cegep, a lot of things occurred that took a toll on my family. Let me first say that I was raised in a caring, empathetic household that always put family first. Sometimes, that commitment created a strain, particularly when we took my grandmother in. She suffered from Parkinson's disease as well as dementia. It was an emotional rollercoaster for the 11 months she lived with us. On the night of her passing, I was asleep when I awoke to my mother screaming. My grandmother fell over onto the floor and wasn't responsive. I immediately got her in a position to start chest compressions and I urged my mother to call 911 amidst all the chaos. This experience was both traumatic and enlightening because I knew that helping people was something I wanted to make a career out of.

Bachelor's Degree

Having already applied to university, I initially stuck with the original plan of psychology because I wanted to understand mental illness more in-depth and help others manage it. Fast forward about two years into my degree in 2015 and I had a moment during one of my Abnormal Psychology lectures. I thought to myself: "I want to pursue psychiatry". This brief sentence was the catalyst that made me change my path.

Before I continue, I wanted to reiterate something: it's completely normal to not have your path laid out from the beginning. You don't have to become a doctor by the age of 25 and have your life together. Sometimes, we must go through some detours, but the detours don't mean we're lost! Our pathways may be full of orange cones like the streets of Montreal (if anyone understands this reference, thank you!), but we can push through and come out smooth like freshly laid asphalt on a driveway.



So, back to my erratic tale. I decided to complete my degree in psychology. I was worried at first about whether I would be making a mistake, but I regret absolutely nothing. My background in psychology was and is still beneficial to this day! Education is never a waste, so don't ever feel like you have to change degrees because of a time constraint. Afterwards, I had to begin the second phase of my pre-med journey which involved taking all my basic science prerequisite courses.

Second Phase of Pre-Med Journey

I think this was where I began to have doubts in my academic capabilities. I knew my GPA from undergrad wasn't in a competitive range. This period of my life was rough because while I received (and continue to receive) heartwarming support from my family and loved ones, there were always those select few whose negative commentary spoke louder volumes. Thus began a cycle involving periods of self-doubt, insecurity, and burnout. It got to a point where my parents began worrying for my mental health. I'm grateful for everyone who has been and currently is here for me, supporting me in this, because it's a lot to deal with. Especially when you reach a point in life where people around you get married and have children. It's completely normal to feel envious or to experience fear of missing out by the way. I was always told to ignore what other people are doing and to focus on myself. However, our curiosity can get the better of us, so it's important to catch yourself doing these things, and to allow the accompanying emotions to fall through. By doing this, you embrace and understand your doubts and insecurities. This will allow you to move forward. At the end of the day, you need to tell yourself that everything you're experiencing is normal and that if you feel that you need help, please go and seek it! Whether it's from your support circle or from a professional, there is nothing wrong with having doubts along your pre-med journey. Trust me, I've had so many and I'm not giving up yet!

After Undergrad: What now?

One question we often ask ourselves is what to do after undergrad if we haven't gotten accepted? A second undergrad or perhaps graduate studies? It's a difficult question to answer unfortunately; the response depends on your situation. When I was applying for med at a certain point, I also started considering other programs, and I got accepted into my M.Sc. in Experimental Surgery at McGill University. This is also within the faculty of medicine, so I initially thought to myself "oh perfect! I'm in the same faculty, just a different department, this is fantastic!" and honestly, my M.Sc. really solidified my motivation to be a healthcare professional. It was an interesting experience to say the least; I did a non-thesis program which permitted me to enroll in courses of multiple disciplines (including Global Health, Education, etc.). I also had the opportunity to enroll in a course where students are grouped together and given tools and resources to potentially start a med-tech company! It was indeed diverse and unique. It definitely wasn't all sunshine and rainbows; there were times I wanted to quit midway and end my journey altogether. I would constantly have the same arguments with myself: "you're getting old, how are you going to get married and start a family, you're gonna put yourself in debt, etc...."

You know something? I still have these arguments, but I now know how to respond: "Yes, I'm ageing but I don't care, it's part of life. You best believe I will get married and have my children when I AM READY (even if that may be during med school or residency one day), and I understand that debt is terrifying, but we're going to be ok, we got this!". I suggest coming up with a mantra and repeating it to yourself whenever you can. You got this, you will get into medical school, and if you do get in and realize medicine isn't for you.....then that's fine! We're only human. Get back out there and start a new journey.

I hope this blurb can be of help to anyone who's down in the dumps about their applications. I'm still here, 26 years of age and applying! Just remember that you got this!

