Tips that helped me succeed in my pre-med years

ALLISON CHOWN [MED 1]

*Hi everyone! My name is Allie and I was recently accepted to the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) in my hometown of Sudbury, ON. As I make this transition from a "premed" to a medical student, I've had the opportunity to reflect on the growth I experienced throughout my undergrad, what (I think) has contributed to my acceptance to medical school, and some things that helped me through my undergraduate degree. If you don't feel like reading this whole thing (which I wouldn't blame you for), just know this- if **you work hard, follow your passions, and be yourself, everything will work out**. That is the most cliché thing to hear, and I know I hated hearing that before, but I've realized that it's true. There is no secret formula to getting into medical school. Pursue what you are interested in and it will make your application stand out. Don't let your life purpose become getting into medicine - if you are deserving (which, you are) then it will come! <u>Enjoy the process, learn from everything, seek opportunities, and never settle.</u> If you have any questions about my journey after reading my "story" below, feel free to message me!*

Do what you're interested in, and everything will be easier

This comes from the saying "If you love your job, you'll never work a day in your life". This was something I grew up hearing and helped direct a lot of decisions that I made. When it came time to decide what undergraduate degree to take, I settled on a B.Sc. in Neuroscience because I was so interested in the brain and wanted to know more. I was also considering taking a more general B.Sc. (which I had heard was easier) but throughout my undergrad I realized that it would have been a lot harder for me to stay motivated in a more general degree. It was so much easier to put in long hours studying because I was so interested in what I was learning. Taking Neuroscience also led to some amazing experiences. I got to work with a nurse at a long-term care facility and learn how to care for patients with severe cases of dementia. I got to perform research on the mechanisms of anesthetics at the University of Toronto. I had the opportunity to shadow a Neuropathologist. All of these experiences came out of me following my passion (...and a lot of support from everyone around me, and a lot of time sending emails, and a lot of time applying for positions...), <u>but</u> I believe that all of these opportunities wouldn't have presented themselves if I didn't follow what I was passionate about. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't always easy. I considered switching degrees when I experienced my first tough neuroscience course. I had rejection letters upon rejection letters and it took me 3 years of applying to research jobs to get one. I spent many hours studying for those tough courses. But I didn't give up!

Have a backup plan

No one can bank on getting into medical school right away, no matter how smart or driven they are. Even if you think you will get in on your first try, _having a backup plan will make you more well-rounded and will add to your ABS/CV_. During my B.Sc., I was concurrently pursuing a Bachelor of Education so that I could become a teacher if my medical school application didn't pan out. I always liked working with kids, and I always loved teaching. I think having this backup made me feel a lot more comfortable during the interview process, because I didn't _need_ to get in...I just really wanted to. It also made me a more well-rounded individual and reminded me that my whole life wasn't about getting into medical school. I tutored children in low-income areas, worked with students with learning disabilities, and formed a lot of meaningful relationships. It gave me an understanding of the needs of my community and I got to talk about a lot of these experiences in my applications. By September of my fourth year, I even had a backup plan for my backup plan, since I was accepted to do a Master's degree in the same lab where I held my summer research job! I'm the type of person that likes to plan years ahead, and having a solid backup plan made everything seem more manageable.

Don't compare yourself to others

I'm sure everyone has heard this about a million times, but it's true (it's also something that I still struggle with at times). It's really easy to get caught up in what others are doing, where they're volunteering, what their grades are, what summer job they got... but you'll never know the whole story. Even if you do, you still can't compare yourself to them. Everyone has their own path, their own way of talking about what they're doing, and their own reasons for doing it. At the end of the day, you know yourself better than anyone else, so _trust yourself to be the best YOU can be_. At times, I definitely got wrapped up in how many hours others seemed to be volunteering, research positions they got, and cool opportunities they had found. The admissions committee (from what I have heard) wants individuals who are passionate and interesting. _There is only one you, so being yourself is your best chance at having a stellar application._

Quality over quantity

This goes for studying, friendships, building your CV, and spending your time in general. It's easy to get wrapped up in "I need to get more volunteer hours" or even "I need to study but I really don't want to so I'll just keep playing on my phone" (it happens to everyone, don't worry). If you look back on your 4 short years in university, would you be happy spending that on your phone? Volunteering for somewhere you hate? Doing something just to say you did? It's tricky to find balance, and you'll probably have a hard time finding something you always want to do (whether it be studying, volunteering, working...) but it seems to get easier if you want to do it most of the time!

Track EVERYTHING

This was advice that I got when I did a mentoring program with the local medical school when I was in my first year of undergrad. *It helped me remain reflective, see the end goal, and make sure I was using my time wisely.* If you volunteer, track the dates and hours. It would also help to track the contact information of whoever you were volunteering for. Occasionally, going back to this list I kept helped me to see what I was doing, if I could be doing more, and kept me well-rounded. When application time rolled around, it was so much easier to fill out all the sections. I still felt the classic "I should have done more" when it came time to write my ABS, but it wasn't the first time I had experienced this feeling. A few times throughout my undergrad when I was reviewing my list, I would realize I could be doing more, and I was able to do something about it then. "Track everything" was great advice to hear in my first year of University, and I strongly recommend that everyone does this even if you aren't sure what you want to do after undergrad!

Leave things better than you found them

This is a great way to make the most out of any work or volunteer opportunities you have. Something might already be great, but *by taking it to the next level you show that you care about what you do and that you can have a lasting impact.* If you tutor an individual, think "how can I make this better?"- you could start free group tutoring sessions for instance. If you join a program and notice an area that's lacking, think "how can I address this?". Not only will this make you more excited to participate in these activities, but it's great experience to start something, to fail at something, or to work with others to make changes.

Last words

Medicine is challenging, exciting, and rewarding. The application processes and everything leading up to it can be an emotional rollercoaster. *If you work hard, follow your passions, and remember why you're doing it, it will make things easier.* Don't just think about what will make you a great applicant, but what will make you a great doctor. Take risks, put yourself out of your comfort zone, appreciate everyone who helps you along the way, and enjoy the process! Then, sit back and wait for the interviews to come rolling in.