

In my preparation for a career as a dentist, I observed and worked with various clinical populations. I have grown to understand the practice of dentistry and learned some of the skills that are necessary to become successful. Undeniably one needs technical skills and medical knowledge, but a great dentist must also have excellent interpersonal skills, the ability to empathize with a diverse population, and the desire to serve. As I have travelled the educational trajectory towards dental school, I have grown in my knowledge and skills and I am confident in my ability to be an advocate for all of my patients and to treat each individual patient with the respect they deserve.

My lack of access to oral health care initially fueled my passion for dentistry. Growing up in foster care, I suffered from a pulsing throb in my gums, a shock wave up a root when biting down, a headache that agitated me in classrooms, and a self-consciousness that inhibited my natural inclination to smile. I was dependent on Medi-Cal to respond to my oral health needs, yet the number of dentists accepting Medi-Cal was insufficient in my community. It was difficult to schedule an appointment to get a cleaning, and a much more complex process to address my condition. Eventually my problems were resolved, but they were not forgotten, and when I entered UC Berkeley, I was clearly focused on one career: dentistry. As a dentist, I want to increase access to dental services among underserved communities. I am a unique applicant in that I am a product of the foster care system and that I have surmounted numerous odds. I believe my experiences will translate into the dental profession because I possess an insight to successfully address the unique needs of children in foster care. I learned that taking care of children requires an individualized approach based on each child's need and weakness. Similarly, these experiences can translate into the dental profession because excellence in dentistry begins with a careful diagnosis and treatment plan. It is important to design and implement an individualized treatment plan based on the unique needs of each patient.

To gain a foundation for my desired profession, I applied to the University of Washington Summer Medical and Dental Education Program (SMDEP) the summer after my freshman year. I shadowed dentists in various specialties and witnessed a number of complex procedures such as the construction of bridges, corrective jaw surgery, and root canals. Just as important, however, was the knowledge I gained that dentistry is more than drilling and filling. Success is highly dependent on good dentist-patient interactions and a mutual understanding between the patient and the provider, along with collaborations with support staff who can assist with the efficient and effective administration of treatment.

I also saw this when I was volunteering at migrant farmworker camps in rural Washington. Given my own background, I could relate to the workers' inadequate access to oral care services. At the camps, I assisted the dental staff with screenings and oral health education and came to understand that my upbringing in a disadvantaged and underserved community is now an asset as it allows me to empathize with those in need. This was also evident during my volunteer work in an endodontic clinic, where the treatments were more frightening and invasive, and the patients more fearful and anxious. My amiable personality, ability to empathize, and good interpersonal skills facilitated trust,

which, in turn alleviated patients worries and fears.

I have a passion to reach out to underprivileged communities and hope to do this as a dentist. I fulfilled this passion throughout college by tutoring youth from low-income communities who have experienced homelessness and financial instability. The trauma and stress they encountered was something I handled with confidentiality, sensitivity, and compassion; all skills that will be transferred to my practice of dentistry.

As a former foster youth, I experienced what it is like to feel less fortunate, less worthy, less good, less capable, less lovable, less important, and most importantly, have less access to oral health care. My experiences have given me a rich perspective on the value of serving others. This desire to serve others in this capacity has guided me towards the dental profession.