

Dental school Personal Statement (PDF)

With spindly legs and frizzy hair, I backhanded the bright yellow tennis ball across the court to my opponent. She quickly ran up to the net, hit an overhead shot, and the ball zoomed towards me faster than I had expected. The next thing I know I was on the concrete court with a handful of blood gushing from my mouth. The ball had hit me in my face, knocking out my front tooth. I was horrified, our yearly school photographs were the next day. The first thought that raced in my mind was how I would have to smile with lips glued together, fearful of being teased by my classmates. It was in this moment that I recognized how my teeth, and specifically, my smile, were so integral to who I was as a person. My teachers and friends described my smile as a contagious form of love, and the thought of losing this trait was terrifying. This experience laid the foundation for my keen interest in dentistry: a career that will afford me the opportunity to enable my patients to smile brightly and to feel like their most confident selves.

My interest in dentistry further matured after I travelled to India to help assist with a dental health mission with my temple in the rural town of Dwarka. Here, our team set up a clinic in several tents and offered free dental services to those in need. Specifically, I assisted dental hygienists with cleanings, observed dentists fill cavities and fit dentures, and helped with dental hygiene education. I recall meeting Mona, an 8-year-old girl with a lopsided ponytail. She inquisitively wrapped the bubble gum flavored floss around her fingers and mirrored my motions guiding the tasty strings through her teeth. Her mother told me that she had received floss before, but no one had taken the time to explain how to correctly floss or the benefits of flossing. Though through a simple exchange, here, I recognized the power of dental education. A brief conversation with Mona had set her on the path to healthy gums and teeth, and a new friendship.

In an effort to learn more about dentistry upon returning from India, I began volunteering at a general dentistry practice. My main duties involved welcoming patients to our practice, performing health screenings, and coordinating their follow-up care. Through this experience I also had the opportunity to shadow Dr. Simon, a pediatric dentist who had a cabinet overflowing with yo-yos and an ability to put children at ease despite the painful procedures they were anticipating. I was frequently reminded of my own experience as a child, as many of our patients came in with broken front teeth secondary to various misadventures. Regardless of the pathology that plagued the patient, Dr. Simon took the time to ask his patients about their favorite class in school, what laughing gas flavor they preferred, and any new comic books that he should know about. As we developed a closer relationship, Dr. Simon told me that he was drawn to dentistry because it enabled him to both help kids live healthier lives and have beaming, confident smiles. He spoke with genuine conviction, and his words resonated deeply with me.

My experiences working with patients motivated me to pursue health care services research related to dentistry. My main project observed various demographics including gender, race, and socioeconomic status and categorized which adult patients have increased access to regular dental care as classified by yearly cleanings and required fillings. Here, I saw a stark difference in which patients have stable access to dental care and gained a deeper understanding of the disparities that contribute to the less reliable care of those from underserved communities. My research motivated me to institute an outreach program at the pediatric dental clinic I had volunteered at. I described

the problem and constructed a proposal for which I received community funding that I subsequently used to create educational brochures for patients and their families. We also utilized this funding to offer these patients free cleanings and screenings on Friday afternoons for over a year. Through this experience, I recognized that as a dentist, I would be able to serve as a health advocate for my patients to equally restore smiles across several communities.

Although my experience losing my front tooth occurred at a young age, it left a lasting impression just as a smile does when you first meet someone. I have been fortunate to learn about dentistry through the lens of different practitioners and patients in a variety of environments. All of these experiences have culminated in my strong desire to pursue dentistry, a career that will empower me to deliver necessary care to ensure others can live healthier lives with confident smiles. I will carry my compassion for helping others with my desire to increase equal access to healthcare services with me forward as a future dentist.