

Do You Have a Doctor in You?

BY NEHA SHABEER, SOPHOMORE,
ASHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Asking a seventeen year old to decide what they want to do for the next 48 years of their life sounds like an insane request. But that's exactly what young students are asked to do. While one can always change their major in college, most students enjoy the security of having a declared major. From medicine to business to foreign languages to criminal justice, there are hundreds of majors to choose from, and with little real-life experience, the choice seems close to impossible for many. Most students pick a course of study based on subjects they enjoy and excel at, but often it is difficult for a student to be sure they are pursuing the right career unless they have had a little taste of the profession themselves.

Luckily, the Breaking the Barriers club at Ashland High School (AHS) is helping students get more information and experience in the fields they are interested in. The club has proposed to have students pick the career and a speaker, including AHS alumni, they want to hear from every month and organize an event after school. All interested students can attend to hear about the speaker's work and apply for shadowing. This project would be adding onto the concept the AHS guid-

ance started with Health Career Nights, a night students can speak to a panel of professionals from the health care field for insight into the field.

From personal experience, I can say that shadowing a professional truly opens your eyes and lights your passions for the field. I shadowed a pediatrician during spring break of last school year and got the chance to interview him after the experience to provide insight for others interested in the medical field.

Below is my interview with Dr. Matthew Benz, a pediatrician for 14 years at Southboro Medical Group. Dr. Benz completed his undergraduate studies at Middlebury College, holds a Master's of Science from M.I.T. and completed his M.D. at Tufts University School of Medicine. Following medical school, he completed his residency training in pediatrics at the University of Rochester. He is clearly very educated and busy, so I am honored to have had the chance to pick his brain for an interview!

NS: Why do you think it is important for students to shadow professionals before they make the choice for a career in medicine?

MB: A career in medicine can be extremely rewarding, however it is not suited for everyone. Therefore, it is important for students considering



Pediatrician Dr. Matthew Benz
(Photo/submitted)

this professional path to seek out and explore shadowing opportunities in order to make a more informed decision.

NS: What will students achieve during their shadowing?

MB: Students will gain a unique vantage point by observing various aspects of a typical day in the life of a physician, which may include morning hospital rounds, learning how a medical history is obtained, observing physical examinations, interpretation of vital signs, lab results and x-rays, and learning the basics of medical decision making. They will also gain knowledge from learning about some of the basic operational aspects of a typical primary care office, which might include telephone triage for urgent care issues arising during the day, and how physicians communicate with office staff, and other medical providers during the day.

NS: What do you hope to impart to students who shadow you?

MB: I hope to give students a sense of what it is like to be a general pediatrician, and to highlight some of the unique aspects of the profession, working with children from birth through age 21, through both periods of wellness and illness.

NS: When is the best time for a student to shadow with a doctor?

MB: It really depends on the individual physician and practice, as well as the student's

schedule. Most commonly, we try to set something up around a student's vacation time, but I think any high school student with a potential interest in the medical field could benefit from a shadowing experience. It depends on a variety of factors and should really coincide with the time of peaked interest rather than to be thought of as an activity to enhance a college application. Some students might reach this point in high school, college or after college. It is to assist students to decide if they could picture themselves working in the role of a physician someday.

NS: What skills or qualities do you believe an ideal doctor needs to possess?

MB: The ideal skill set is somewhat specific for the type of specialty. For instance, in addition to making sound medical judgments, surgeons or procedure-based physicians require a high degree of technical skill. Regardless of specialty, all physicians need to be possess excellent communication skills, which includes, first and foremost being a good listener.

NS: What doors has medicine opened for you?

MB: In addition to my clinical work, medicine has provided many rewarding professional opportunities for me, such a volunteer work, teaching, and research. There are many opportunities for physicians who want to get involved in these areas

NS: What other career options do students have in the medical field other than being a doctor?

MB: There are many other potential options for students to consider, such as earning a nursing, or physician assistant degree. Both of these professional tracks offer considerable options to specialize in a particular area of interest, such as sports medicine or emergency medicine. Laboratory science is an ever changing field (for example, microbiology, hematology, pathology) and would also be another area for students to consider. Radiology technicians assist with a variety of different procedures, such as CT, MRI

and ultrasound.

NS: How did you know medicine was the career for you?

MB: The decision to become a doctor evolved over a number of years, and was fostered by volunteer experiences, such as in a pediatric dialysis unit, as well as some medical school courses (histology and pathology) that I cross-registered for while in graduate school.

NS: Why should students go into the medical field? What are the job prospects like?

MB: Students should consider a career in medicine if they have a strong interest in the biological sciences and feel fulfilled and enjoy helping people. The job prospects are currently very good.

NS: Anything else you would like to mention to Ashland High School students and community members?

MB: It is not necessary to make a decision about going into medicine while in high school or even in college. Many first-year medical students start two to six years after college, allowing them to pursue other activities, such as the Peace Corp, graduate school, teaching and other professions. It is important and helpful to have some real-world experience before starting down the professional path to a medical career. The decision should really come from the heart.

My shadowing experience with Dr. Benz was incredible and I learned some invaluable knowledge about the profession. For anyone who is even slightly interested in a medical career, I highly recommend shadowing a doctor. Although, be super careful- I was sick for two weeks with little kid germs after my internship!

As Dr. Benz stated, before being a doctor or choosing any career, is not a decision one needs to make in high school, but it is one makes with passion. So wait, enjoy high school, and make the choice you believe in no matter what career you choose.

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