

The Evolution of a Doctor: From Medical Student to Intern

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“If you can picture yourself being happy doing literally anything other than medicine, you should do that.” This advice was one of many warnings I received about my desire to become a physician. Even though I listened to countless physicians' and family members' words of wisdom about why I shouldn't go into medicine, I always veered back to this career path. Once I solidified that I wanted to become a physician, I continued the pre-med journey and never looked back.

Fast-forward to medical school graduation when my journey as a “wannabe physician” ended. I couldn't believe it. I had done it! After 16 years of dreaming about this career, I was finally a doctor! On top of that, I matched into my dream specialty at my dream program. Instead of feeling only joy, though, I was surprised by another emotion – part of me felt a sense of grief as I wrapped my head around the fact that my pre-med identity was ending. I took time after graduation to reflect on the road that got me here; every step of my journey was so meaningful to me and allowed me to evolve into the person I am today. I recognized that this shift was part of an even bigger story, and this realization allowed me to focus on packing up my apartment in Colorado and starting my move to California.

A few weeks later, I walked into the UCLA Pediatrics Residency Orientation feeling nervous and excited about meeting my cohort who would soon become my colleagues and support system over the next three years. My nervousness swiftly lifted as I was greeted by hugs and smiling faces from my co-interns and administration. After seeing my co-interns on social media over the last few months, it was incredible witnessing their personalities firsthand and learning about their goals and dreams. Over the next week and a half, we bonded over various trainings and social events, and I felt a sense of peace as I recognized that my years of determination had gotten me to the right place.

My first month of residency consisted primarily of inpatient wards; the 12-hour days and 24-hour shifts were familiar to me from my medical school sub-internships and clinical clerkships, but I was surprised by the physical and mental fatigue I felt after work every day. I did not recognize it at the time, but I had a layer of protection between myself and my patients as a medical student because I was not the one making the final decisions on patients' care. As an intern, even though most of our decisions are made in collaboration with our seniors and attendings, I feel a new level of autonomy and responsibility in the decision-making process as I submit orders and brainstorm new directions for my patients' management. In the beginning, I often found myself facing decision fatigue after a long shift and relying on my family to figure out simple things like what we should eat for dinner. After my first couple weeks of residency, I finally adjusted to

these new demands of my daily life. However, the emotional side of intern year has had its own learning curve.

While the emotional nature of medicine is widely known, switching roles from medical student to intern has amplified this experience for me. As a medical student, I often felt like a middleman between my patients and the residents and, as a result, I was able to maintain some emotional distance from my patients' experiences. As an intern, I feel heavily invested in my patients' well-being as I am the one who is called to bedside when a crisis arises. Over the last four weeks, I have had to call rapid responses, de-escalate parents, and advocate for patients who needed emergent interventions. Because of my amazing co-residents, senior residents, attendings, and experienced nursing staff, I have navigated these challenging situations and am lucky to say I have never felt alone. While I know that my ability to emotionally connect with my patients is a gift, it is often difficult to leave my emotions at work. I am eager to find strategies throughout intern year that will allow me to provide excellent patient-centered care while also safeguarding my emotional well-being.

As I have officially wrapped up my first month of residency, I now see that intern year is much more than learning how to do medicine: it is a multi-faceted learning experience that requires me to push myself to new physical, mental, and emotional limits. I am incredibly grateful to have co-residents and administrators who are genuinely invested in seeing me succeed. The support and comradery that I feel keep me motivated to go to work every day, and I am thrilled to say that even in the face of my most difficult moments so far, I am more convinced than ever that I chose the right career path.



Dr. Meredith A. Ware recently graduated from medical school at Rocky Vista University in Colorado and is now a pediatrics intern at UCLA. Prior to medical school, she played NCAA Division I volleyball at University of Houston, conducted research at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, worked in autism research at UCLA, and completed a master's degree in human anatomy at University of Colorado. She is currently interested in a career in hospital medicine or pediatric critical care. In her free time, she loves to play beach volleyball, try new restaurants, and hike and ski in the mountains.