



Student Perspective

My Journey to Becoming an Army Doctor

by Nicholas Krueger, MCW–Milwaukee medical student and Second Lieutenant in the US Army

As a young kid growing up in a household with no military experience, with no access to firearms or anything of the like, I strangely always wanted to be a US Army soldier. Maybe it was the video games, maybe it was the stories I heard from Adam's cousin who worked within the special forces community during a still very prominent post-9/11 era. Whatever the reason, it was most certainly superficial with a sprinkle of the sense of "duty." Well, being from an extended family where military service was non-existent and joining was synonymous with danger and death, I was forbade from pursuing that path. Although my motives changed, I never lost that yearning for service.

Through many influences and both fortunate and unfortunate life events, I decided to attend college in hopes of one day becoming a doctor to help people like my grandmother who was diagnosed with Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia. With my "team" at my side, I made it through school with some success but a lot of struggle. Looking back on my journey, I've always had a "team" with me. That initial team was my family, mostly my grandmother, along with my close and supportive high school and college friends.

I guess it was a combination of growing up with three brothers close in age, along with being involved in just about every team sport there is since I was able to walk, which engrained in me the sense of team and the need for support along with the motivation to lead when necessary. When applying for medical school, I wasn't thinking about any of the above, aside from wanting to help people like my grandma. Through seemingly random connections, I was

introduced to Dr. Michael McBride who (unknown to me) was a retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel and an alum of both MCW and the US Army Medical Department (AMEDD). He questioned my motives for applying to and attending medical school, which quickly took an unexpected turn during which we discussed his long, decorated career with the Army. I will be forever grateful that he re-sparked that sense of service within me which, interestingly, came mostly from him relating my teamwork mentality to his work with the troops. Retrospectively, I may have fallen victim to his “psychiatry Jedi mind-tricks” when he convinced me to join up. Nevertheless, I’m indebted to him for helping me make the most important – and best – choice of my life.

Just before college graduation and immediately after being accepted to my dream school (MCW), I raised my right hand and was commissioned as an officer in the US Army. However cheesy it may sound, my life changed profoundly after that day as I joined the brotherhood to which I had been longing for all my life. I threw myself into learning more about the culture and what my future career had in store for me.

Part of my learning process was attending, and then eventually leading, the [Warrior Partnership](#) here at MCW. The Warrior Partnership is a meeting held twice a year in which medical students and veterans from all recent conflicts (mostly Vietnam) come together for one day a week for four weeks and discuss their experiences before, during, and most importantly, after war. The stories told and the tears shed will stay with me the rest of my life. As a student, I really felt like these veterans were teaching us how to care for them as they are a very unique population. But as an Army officer, I truly felt them reaching out to me with their moving stories and anecdotes to try and care for the future servicewoman and serviceman through me. My major takeaway from these incredible experiences is that there are those who go out and protect us every single day but, *who is here to protect the protectors?* Being a military healthcare provider, it is my duty and honor to be able to fill this role.

At the time I am writing this essay, I have partaken in 180 days of active duty training which have brought me to Oklahoma, Texas, Washington D.C, and Washington State. The lessons learned from the soldiers and my mentors will

never be forgotten and have helped shape the person I am and the doctor I will become. I take great pride in my clinical skills and the patient interactions which no doubt stem greatly from my training with the Army. I believe that the emphasis on teamwork along with the “never give up” mentality will allow me to provide superior care to all my future patients.

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The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Army, Department of Defense, or the US Government.