



Perspective/Opinion

My Experience as a Navy Medical Student

By Connor Ford, 3rd year medical student

From a young age, I grew up idolizing both my grandfathers for their service, one as a Naval Aviator in Korea and the other a World War II Army veteran. When I was first told that my maternal grandpa, Navy Captain Jerome Driscoll, flew cartographers over Antarctica to map out glaciers for the first time, I was amazed. When I learned that he received the honor of a glacier being named after him, not only was I proud to be his grandson, but I felt I had one of the best fun facts to share with my friends.

To keep it short, my family has a rich history of military service. My mother served as a naval nurse, and four of her other siblings served across various military branches. My father also served as a naval physician - my parents actually met in the Navy! Lastly, with a cousin of mine being a naval flight surgeon, it probably comes as no surprise that upon acceptance to medical school, I quickly became interested in the Navy Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP). While the application process involved an abundance of paperwork and patience, it all felt worthwhile when I commissioned into the Navy as an officer, right in the lobby of MCW shortly after M1 classes began.

For the most part, being a Navy HPSP medical student is nearly identical to being a civilian student. The differences are that we are on full scholarship for school, attend a 5-week Officer Development School during summer term, attend our away rotations at military hospitals, and apply for the military residency match.

While Officer Development School (ODS) is known to be a difficult yet rewarding experience where we are taught all about life in the Navy, it was uniquely challenging for our class as it was scheduled in May of 2020, only two months into the pandemic. After quarantining individually in a hotel room for two weeks, we were finally able to learn how to march, salute, wear uniforms, follow orders, put out fires, fix a sinking ship in a simulation, and perform fitness testing. At the conclusion of the five weeks, I left ODS with new, lifelong friends who I cannot wait to serve alongside once on active duty.

After graduation from medical school and an intern year, we are promoted to the rank of lieutenant and either go on to residency in our specialty of choice or serve as a General Medical Officer (GMO) for one or more years prior to residency. Upon graduation from residency, we serve as an active duty naval physician for a minimum of four years as payback time. We are likely stationed at a military hospital in the U.S. or overseas, but we are also eligible to be deployed at any time, depending on the needs of the Navy.

Beyond my family's legacy of military service, I was drawn toward HPSP for the opportunity to serve alongside and provide care for those who dedicate their lives to our country. I believe it is an honor to be a part of their care, and I also enjoy the idea of being able to care for patients without worrying about if their insurance will provide coverage or if they can afford the care they deserve.

Military service has provided my family with so many opportunities, and I am honored and excited to continue my family's legacy of service. I look forward to the adventures that lie ahead of me as a future physician in the Navy.

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