

# The Reality of Barriers to Specific Populations of Pre-Health Students

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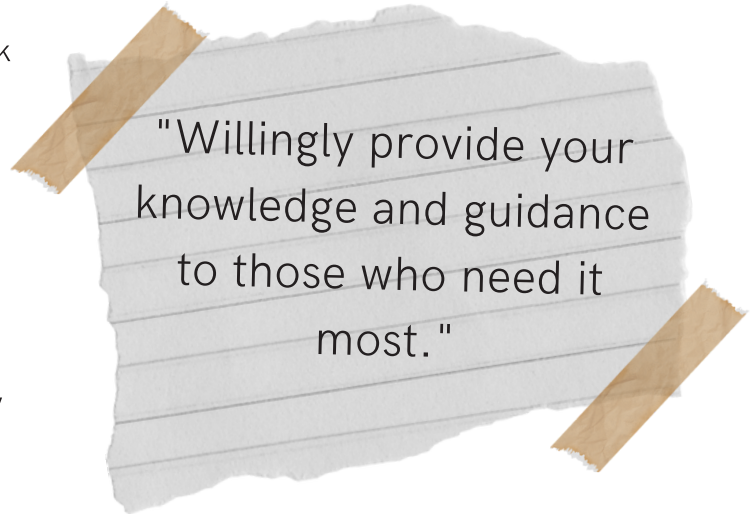
The following was written as a means to gain insight into the hurdles faced by a disadvantaged student on their path to becoming a healthcare professional. The dynamic of the specific student that I am describing applies not only to myself, but also to a significant population of students, including some peers that I have been fortunate enough to meet throughout my years on the pre-health path. Perspective comes not only from viewing and experiencing, but also from understanding on a deeper level than just the surface. There is often a select group of individuals that get overshadowed in the race to achieve the goals of getting into a school of health professions. Navigating a strenuous new process without guidance or mentors coupled with the need for time allocation to alleviate an unfortunate financial situation only adds more weight and stress to the already rigorous path that is a future career in medicine. On paper the individual who is faced with these additional stressors could be seen as not putting in enough effort to serve and adhere to requirements of their undergraduate career, but due to the unfortunate reality of necessary commitments and more strict financial situations, plans are interrupted, and a specific goal is not always able to be reached to its fullest potential. These can be seen as excuses by some, but it's the reality for this population of students that are often overlooked.

The road to success in medicine is difficult for everyone, but when the pressure and stress of an uncontrollable family or financial situation are also added, it can become overwhelming. The external stress placed upon our situation, which is out of our control, constantly sits in the back of the mind, plaguing our thoughts and future plans. It is as if you have been running a race for years with the single goal to finish, but the added weight of needing to take detours forces you to face the reality that you may never reach the finish line. The recurring notion of respect, passion, and love for a future career in the medical field over other priorities in life does not always coincide with one's current financial status. The many costly requirements to achieve a career in medicine can seem insurmountable when rent is still due, food is still needed, and expenses continually arise.

In addition to external factors, the unintentional pressure from family members and peers to succeed can cause further stress. Trying to explain the stringent requirements and lengthy road to a career in healthcare to an immigrant parent who works day and night to give you a better future seems impossible. Immigrant parents come to this country under the impression that their children will go to school, get a degree, and begin working once the diploma is brought home. However, when embarking on this specific path and explaining all that is required and what the possibilities and pitfalls are, you feel a disconnect between their perceived notion of what you're doing and what they believe you should be doing. These are feelings that are hard to put into words.

By providing insight to those who are in fortunate positions and are pursuing medicine under a different set of family and financial restraints, it is my goal to foster understanding, empathy, and community building. In several years, many of the individuals reading this article will go on to become health professionals or work in the medical field.

The request that I and others with similar situations ask is, when you are in a position that gives you the opportunity to give back to the overlooked or underserved communities, willingly provide your knowledge and guidance to those who need it most. When a peer or student comes to you explaining why they don't have patient care experience or enough volunteer hours, don't knock them down and tell them that they aren't good enough, but instead use empathy and understanding to guide the student to the right opportunities to enrich their education.



When a student asks for advice or insight on why their application was rejected, use empathy to encourage them to improve their application instead of immediately writing an invoice and turning them away when they can't pay on the spot. These all are realities that I and several students I know in similar positions have faced. I ask this not as a request for your sympathies, but simply to present an opportunity to recognize what many individuals endure on their path. I believe that understanding each other's unique struggles will create a stronger, more compassionate community.

