

From MCAT Failure to Emergency Physician: My Journey through International Medical School

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After completing residency almost one year ago, I have been extremely reflective over my journey to becoming an attending emergency physician. Growing up, I always knew that I wanted to become a physician, but my journey here has not been easy. Looking back, I did not expect that I would

have to leave the United States for twenty months in order to become a physician. After taking the MCAT several times with a poor score and being rejected from American medical school during two separate application cycles, Ross University School of Medicine gave me the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong goal.

During my application process to medical school, I heard many negative things about students that chose to attend medical school outside of the United States. International medical graduates (IMGs) were lazy, dumb, spoke English poorly, and were horrible physicians — just a few of the things I heard. I internalized the rhetoric, and avoided applying, even while I received rejections from American medical schools daily.

While completing my master's degree in public health and applying for the third time to medical school, I had a friend encourage me to apply to a Caribbean school.

He had multiple other friends that had successfully completed medical school internationally, matched into and

completed a residency in the United States. By this time, I also had several friends that were at Ross that were doing well. I decided that my passion to become a physician was greater than any stereotype of a Caribbean school. I applied to, interviewed and was accepted at Ross University School of Medicine in Dominica, West Indies.

I flew to Dominica on January 1, 2011, and was nervous, excited, and scared all at the same time. Living and studying in Dominica changed me for the rest of my life. Dominica is an island in the Eastern Caribbean. She boasts 290 square miles and with a population of a little less than 75,000 people. Although beautiful, Dominica suffers from the second lowest gross domestic product (GDP) in the Caribbean and 29% of Dominicans live below poverty level. Most Dominicans are of African descent, but I also had the amazing privilege of serving the Carib people, a group of pre-Columbian natives to the island. Studying in Dominica exposed me to patients from different cultures and languages. Beginning my medical career serving a diverse and culturally rich population is a rarity that I appreciated even more as I transitioned back into the United States for clinical rotations.

In 2014, I embarked on my endeavors to match into an emergency medicine residency. I knew the road would be difficult. Even though I had good board scores and clinical grades, most program directors would see my medical school as a blemish on my application, instead of an asset. I found it difficult to find sub-internships in emergency medicine because many medical schools would not allow international medical students to rotate. However, I worked diligently, remained tenacious, and applied broadly. I received multiple rejections from programs, even though my

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

scores were on par with American medical students. Match Day 2015, my hard work and dedication was rewarded by matching into my first choice program.

Although my time in Dominica is in my rearview, my passion for seeing other IMGs complete emergency medicine residency is more heightened than ever before. Our emergency departments are filled with patients of diverse backgrounds, educational levels and levels of health literacy. IMGs, through their experiences in offshore medical schools, are uniquely qualified to see, treat and serve a rapidly changing patient population. Those of us in academia need to work diligently and purposefully to remove the barriers for IMGs to pursuing and matching into emergency medicine here in the United States. International medical schools produce graduates with invaluable experiences that make them incredible physicians and contribute to the landscape of diversity and inclusion. ●

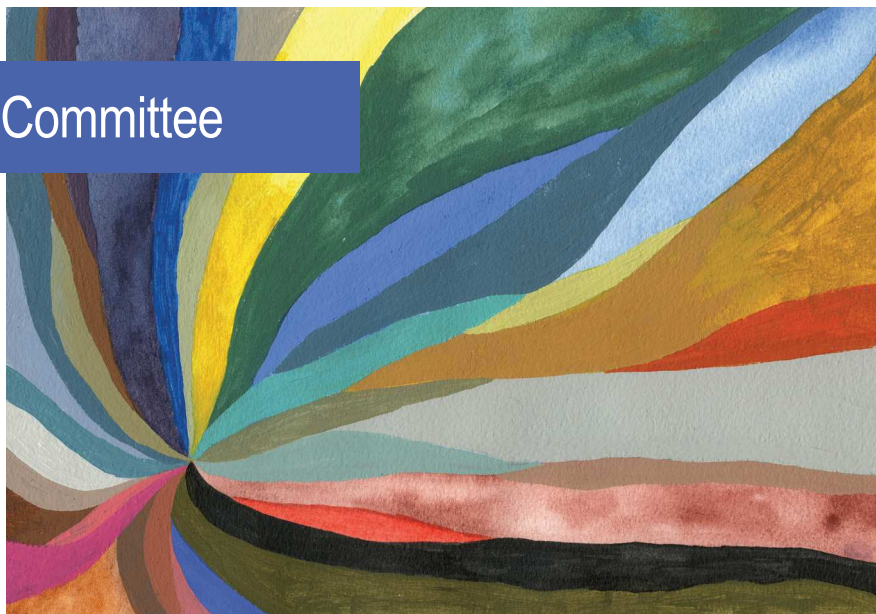
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