

Student Spotlights:

Irene Tsai, MS4



Pic of me while hiking in Yosemite!

Your past: Where did you grow up? Did you always know the medical field was for you?

I grew up on Long Island until age 14, my family moved to Hershey, PA (yes the town sometimes smells like chocolate!) as I was starting 9th grade. After graduating from Hershey High School, we moved back to Long Island. I had a non-traditional path to medicine - I studied Public Policy, Global Health and Inequalities Studies and always imagined myself in a more administrative role in healthcare. After working with physicians in India who practiced clinical medicine and founded/lead the non-profit organization SVYM, I realized that a medical career could be shaped around any goals or interests. I loved how they combined

clinical medicine and public health and hope to do the same in my own career. I attended a 2-year Premed Postbac Program in NYC to complete the science pre-requisites before starting at Stony Brook Medicine.

Your present: What are your hobbies? What activities do you do to help you relax and cope with the stress of medical school and life in general? How have they helped you deal with these stressors?

I love being outside and I spend a lot of time hiking in upstate NY or PA and going to the beach. These activities definitely help me step away from school and be detached for a few hours or days. When I'm not struggling to catch my breath :'), hiking is almost like meditation for me. I also like going to concerts (ranging from EDM to classical music), wineries/breweries, contemporary art museums and trying new restaurants. I'm thankful for my friends and peers in school who have listened to me vent and/or celebrate the ups and downs through the past few years. Sharing experiences with my community definitely makes stressors feel less intimidating. Identifying what helps you recharge and then prioritizing those activities in your limited time off can make all the difference.

Your future: What are you looking forward to? What specialty are you considering?

I dual applied to EM/IM and IM programs and hope to eventually specialize in critical care. I'm looking forward to enjoying the rest of fourth year (which is definitely as relaxing as everyone says it is) and starting residency next year. I can't wait to meet my future co-residents and start becoming a more proficient health care provider. In my career, I want to explore international relationships in healthcare, tackle healthcare inequalities and stay involved in academic medicine.

General advice: Any advice or words of encouragement for others in medical school?

Mentorship at all levels will help you throughout your medical career. Reach out to people outside of your immediate network and ask lots of questions. Hearing different perspectives can be overwhelming but also incredibly helpful in making big decisions (preparing for clerkships, studying for board exams, choosing a specialty) I navigated medical school with the help from so many amazing mentors, who have been medical students, residents and attendings. If you're ever struggling through medical school, it can really help to express any frustrations with friends and other people who understand what you're going through! More often than not, someone else is experiencing/has experienced the same thing as you and can empathize. It's okay and normal to fail and struggle, all we can do is try to be the best versions of ourselves!

Michael Sova, MS1



Me with my dog Bella!

Your past: Where did you grow up? Did you always know the medical field was for you?

I grew up in Reisterstown, Maryland, a suburb outside of Baltimore and attended college in Allentown, Pennsylvania. At age 14, I had brain and spinal surgery for Chiari Malformation which set my path towards medicine. As I continued through college, I developed an appreciation for patients' resiliency through my time as a patient and a volunteer. I try to hold my personal experiences in the medical system as close to me as possible in my medical education.

Your present: What are your hobbies? What activities do you do to help you relax and cope with the stress of medical school and life in general? How have they helped you deal with these stressors?

Guitar, guitar, and more guitar! After my surgery, I picked up the guitar as a new hobby. Though I wasn't very good, something kept drawing me to learn more. It was magical.

I promised myself to never give it up in medical school — that I would keep playing even if it means I'm not necessarily learning, but just maintaining my skill. More than just a hobby, guitar is a spiritual outlet. In my most stressed out moments, I turn to music; in my most relaxed moments, I turn to music. In music, I found a passion and there is nothing as powerful as finding your passion.

Through medical school so far, I have tried to play out regularly, to find other musicians, and to interact with the local community outside of the medical school class. It can be hard to ground yourself and remember that you are more than a medical student, but I believe I have found my way of doing so.

Your future: What are you looking forward to? What specialty are you considering?

I truly do not know what my future holds. I am looking forward to enveloping myself in the world of medicine and to find my passion within medicine. I am currently considering many internal medicine specialties, especially neurology, but in my book, I am completely undecided. And that is okay.

General advice: Any advice or words of encouragement for others in medical school?

I just started, so I do not necessarily feel as qualified as some of my older peers. So far, though, I can say that finding your friends, checking in with yourself, and reminding yourself of your worth are great ways to maintain happiness in medical school!

If you don't know me, I hope to see you around! :)

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance, formally defined as the amount of time spent working compared to the amount of time spent with social support systems and personal priorities, can also be deemed as an active practice of self-care that promotes individual wellness and life fulfillment. Creating work-life balance is a very personal process that begins with identifying values and proceeds to developing strategies to align those values to certain goals and priorities. Time management, task delegation and efficiency are all useful skills to enhance work-life balance. In addition to this however, one must have a sustainable self-care program that involves physical and emotional aspects of life. Physician life coaches recommend the following strategies for promoting work-life balance:

- Time for personal reflection and metacognition: Taking the time for structured reflection enhances your self-awareness and facilitates emotional processing. Being aware of experiences that may have caused certain emotions or reactions and being mindful of your own thoughts can help one evaluate their own needs and values.
- Nurturing a social support system: Phone calls, in-person conversations, video chats, cultural celebrations and social activities with family, friends or any other social supports can help one stay grounded and connected to those around us. Busy schedules can limit social interactions however taking the time to grow and develop relationships important to us can enhance one's feeling of wellness, connectedness and purpose.
- Developing an interest/hobby: Taking the time to engage in activities that bring one joy can actually develop inner stores of resilience and strength. Maintaining a source of happiness through activities and interests help one feel enjoyment in life and stay connected to their values.
- Maintaining physical well-being: This means keeping your body moving, whether that means going to the gym or taking wellness walks or doing 10 minutes of yoga. This also means eating healthy foods (of course home cooked meals are wonderful but if that's not possible then grabbing healthier options from the cafeteria)! This also means having a primary care physician and staying up to date with screenings.

The above mentioned things have been spoken about frequently and are often harder to implement in an busy schedule. The key then is to reflect on your values and priorities and personalize a plan that incorporates one if not all these strategies. These strategies can also be separated in time and space; for example, taking time to reflect and introspect as you walk to and from your car or scheduling one evening of the week for social events and another evening the follow week for a hobby. If work-life balance is integrated and harmonized, where one feels purpose from their experiences, creations and achievements, then there will be feeling of fulfillment.

References:

Balancing Your Life at Work and Home. J Oncol Pract. 2009;5(5):253-255. doi:10.1200/JOP.091018
Shanafelt TD. Finding meaning, balance, and personal satisfaction in the practice of oncology. J Support Oncol. 2005 Mar-Apr;3(2):157-62, 164. PMID: 15796448



Activity Corner:

- Pictionary
- Charades
- Psychiatrist
- Apps based - HeadsUp
- Name, Place, Animal, Thing
- Board Games! Code Names is a great game to play with a group of people!

Oh, There's No Place Like HOME for the Holidays!! By Eshani Goradia

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1julPo17ma62RXC8JZSW7Y1doTZQR400A/view?usp=sharing>

CLINK ON THE LINK ABOVE!
HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!
A SONG TO REMIND YOU TO TAKE A
STUDY BREAK! AND SPEND SOME
TIME WITH LOVED ONES!

Thank you for reading!

Feel free to reach out to our MeSH editors if you have any suggestions or pieces you want to be featured in our next newsletter!

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