

SO YOU *WANNA* BE

(A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL)

A. WHY? That is a very difficult question. It is nice to say you want to help others, serve mankind, be a healer and the like, but do you have the innate talent, inordinate tenacity and at least a semblance of the supercharged motivation needed? Are you truly aware of just what sacrifices you must make? Do not be glib in uttering responses and you would do well to engage in some serious self introspection. If you are serious, these are just the basic questions you must ask yourself and do so, more than once. Even the greatest intentions in the world are of little consequence once pre-health studies begin. ER or the Chicago Hope series do inspire the imagination, but they bear little resemblance to reality. In those productions, all problems, complete with intense looks, musical crescendos and sighs of relief, are solved in an hour. Sometimes a little pathos is thrown in but not much more. The health careers potentially offer great personal rewards but they will take more than just expressed enthusiasm or an internal firestorm ignited by a George Clooney type for you to enter any one of them. You must establish a solid rationale and then you can more easily answer the question, why.

B. DON'T TALK ABOUT IT . . . GO FOR IT. Telling everyone you know that you are a pre-med, pre-dental, pre-pharmacy or pre anything may sound impressive, but talk is cheap. Don't just talk about what you are going to do, go **after** your goal **WHOLE HOG.** Ascertain just what is the best academic route for you (you can major in any discipline), what the recommended preparatory courses are be they in the major or supplemental to it and then establish academic competence. Keep in mind, there are no degrees in pre-med, pre-dental, pre-PT or pre anything. There are preparatory programs for those professions but they are not separate and distinct degrees.

So remember, no one is impressed with what you say you are going to do or be. If that is what you want, to impress your audience, your parents, your peers, or anyone else, you will impress no one.

C. CAN YOU HANDLE SETBACKS? You are going to hit some snags, perhaps a roadblock or two and maybe even be "stunned" by a "C" grade; an experience you may have never previously "enjoyed." Be assured your future in the health professions is not doomed. But such events may raise some self-doubts and induce some genuine fear that success will be elusive. Well, work to remove those doubts. Now if, by chance, you start getting a string of mediocre grades or show little academic growth, then some rethinking is in order. Part of your education is to learn just what your competencies are and are not. So be cognizant that you will likely experience setbacks. At such times you must draw upon your resources and those of the university. Believe it or not, the university does want you to succeed.

D. DO NOT START YOUR ACADEMIC CAREER BY FORMULATING A SERIES OF FALL BACK PLANS. If you have a true focus, having plans B or C will diffuse your intellectual energies. In many instances, it may mean you have given up on plan A before you even started. Select one goal and go **after** it. If, along the way, you realize your initial goal is unattainable, you and an advisor can formulate a new plan and a new goal. You will also have the benefit of knowing that, at least, you gave plan A an honest try and learned that it was not for you. Put another way, there are no security blankets in the world of careers. This is certainly the case in the pre-health professions.

E. ARE YOU A SENSITIVE PERSON? I mean sensitive, not someone who utters a lot of sympathetic phrases. In the past year, had you a reason to cry? Did you? How about getting a bit weepy at a movie, or feeling "tight-throated" at seeing a friend suffer **from** undeserved pain? Or are you just too tough for that sort of nonsense? Having a stiff upper lip may sound like being in possession of personal strength and fortitude. But it is possible it also means you are an arrogant, pompous, unfeeling individual. To be a "healing artist" means you will be treating human beings in pain, physical and psychological, and while you will eventually become inured to it, keep in mind that your patients will honor you for your felt sensitivity.

If you are treating a burn victim, a stroke patient or a client who is terminal, you may

lower lip might quiver a bit. You may enjoy being placed on a pedestal but icons can be easily toppled (just read about malpractice suits). You will be more effective when your patients realize you are sensitive to their feelings as well as their concerns.

F. DO YOU APPRECIATE WHAT IS MEANT BY "HANDS-ON?" It may sound silly but, as a medico you will be **actually** touching people's bodies. While your patients understand this, they may not like it. Young women just entering puberty do not like "being exposed." Neither do their mothers. Men do not like a manual examination of the prostate but it must be done in that manner. When touching and examining a patient's body orifices, limbs or any other part of the anatomy, keep in mind that some patients will feel humiliated as well as embarrassed. You would do well to explain each and every aspect of what you are doing and why it is necessary. That simple act is indicative of one who respects the patient.

G. WHAT IS YOUR SENSE OF ETHIC? Is there a real difference between those who take the Hippocratic oath, and those who seem to practice a hypocritical oath? Abortion rights, euthanasia, HMO's as profit making enterprises or doctors receiving perks from pharmaceutical companies are very serious, indeed, supercharged topics. You should not be neutral. Do you have opinions concerning any issue calling for a moral decision? How would you react to a patient's request to have their life terminated? What about that young spoiled couple "dissatisfied" with their new born child and are seriously considering not taking it home? Could you work with a colleague whose attitudes concerning the treatment of patients is diametrically the opposite of yours? Will you treat a patient who "has never paid his bills?" If the likelihood of the government to provide universal health care by increments becomes a reality, will you become upset, or welcome it? If you attempt to remain neutral on any of these issues, I would suggest that if you become healing professional, few will want your services.

H. HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED AN UNPLEASANT REACTION TO A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL? How did you handle or not handle it? Were you simply embarrassed?

Were you angry? Did you feel your felt concerns were ignored? Were you...
-

treated with ridicule? If you were subjected to a "hands-on" investigatory or treatment procedures, did they seem necessary? Or was your anxiety engendered by an active imagination. Were your concerns the motivation for seeking entry into the health care field? Being a patient is not fun. There is always the haunting, perhaps hurtful fear that something "threatening" might be discovered. What is a routine procedure for the physician is not the norm for the patient. So if you did have less than a pleasant experience, remember it when you treat others.

I. DO YOU KNOW JUST WHAT YOUR COMMITMENTS WILL BE TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL? Think about it! You are going to spend 8 to 15 years in preparation, be likely up to your "eyeballs" in debt, will have missed out on at least four to eight years in lost wages after earning the BA/BS, put an enormous strain on family or personal relationships and end up in a career wherein you will likely be sued for doing the right thing. Should this discourage you? Not at all! You are being told this so as to obviate any surprises. Even so, you will likely be surprised.

Then what is the point of these admonitions? To keep you mentally alert. No one seeking a health career should take that decision lightly. As previously stated, if you achieve your goal, you will experience great personal rewards. Doctors, therapists, pharmacists and other competent health professionals have added to our longevity, an overall better standard of living and to the care of many who, in the past, never expected to be helped.

But, like the old adage, "The larger the pool of knowledge, the longer the shoreline of ignorance" the more medicos know what and how to treat, the more new problems seem to arise. Hence the longer training required in all areas. In addition, there is a greater expectancy of success on the part of the public. Miracles are supposed to be common place. So, enlighten yourself to what others will expect of you.

J. AT WHAT POINT WILL YOU KNOW YOU HIT A STONE WALL? Face it, not everyone who seeks a career in the health professions will achieve that goal. Not because they aren't qualified but because something intervened. Call such interventions, stone walls. All the

intellectual ability, talent and circumstantial luck. Having said that, and assuming you have what it takes, will you know when you have hit a stone wall? Most students are not prepared to even think about such a discussion but it may become necessary. Stone walls can range from severe incapacitating illnesses to the realization that emotionally, intellectually or, perhaps psychologically, one is not going to be a competent health professional.

Like the young woman who "shadowed" a physician and experienced revulsion at what she observed, a stone wall can simply mean, one learns that treating others is just not for them. It is a valid discovery. It could also mean, the original goal was not meant to be. Keep in mind, the only real failures are those who could only talk a good story but never really tried to achieve their stated goal. While this may smack of sentimental pap, anyone who attempts to achieve a goal, becomes aware that it is unattainable for reasons beyond their control is more deserving of respect than those who talk in terms of "I could have been. . ."

So, do you *wannabe* a health professional? If the objectives you have set for yourself are possible of attainment, then the A & S Advising staff and the members of the Prehealth Advising Committee will aid you towards your goals. You need only to ask.