



MEDICINE PERSONAL STATEMENT 2 JAMES

DUKES EDUCATION

"I just want to reach my golden anniversary - that's all I want". That was what a woman with Stage IV ovarian cancer told me while I was shadowing a medical oncologist at Mount Vernon Hospital. As the doctor laid out the options, I was inspired by his honesty with the patient and the respect he demonstrated for her deeply personal interpretation of quality of life.

My interest in Medicine was particularly stimulated by my research year whilst studying Chemistry at Oxford. I developed colour-changing indicators for a biomarker over-expressed in cancer, and later saw the clinical application of my thesis when the Oncologist used similar biomarkers to inform women of their prognoses. In fact, one of the things that motivated me to work hard throughout my degree was thinking about how what I was learning was applicable to people.

The capacity people have to adapt to living with long term illness is remarkable. I volunteer on the Neurology ward in the Royal Free Hospital, which allows me to see first hand the physical and psychological burden of living with disease. As a Community Support Volunteer for the Terrence Higgins Trust, I have seen the personal struggles faced by people with HIV, a disease that still carries with it a significant social stigma. I now closely support an HIV-positive patient by spending time with him, listening to him and helping out in small ways which mean a lot to him.

Further work experience has highlighted some of the demands and challenges of practising medicine. Earlier this year, I was able to shadow junior doctors on a GI surgical ward, as well as a GP in daily practice. Seeing a team of doctors educating a patient with learning difficulties about the complexities of liver failure helped me understand how doctors listen to and communicate with patients. Additionally, watching surgeons of different specialities remove multiple metastases from a patient with late stage skin cancer made me realise the vital role of multi-disciplinary collaboration. From a different perspective, shadowing the GP encouraged me to think about medicine in the wider context of public health, appreciating that primary care improves community health not only by treatment but also by education.

After university, I wanted to move from a lab environment to a people-facing job.

As a Research Executive in the Social Research Institute at Ipsos MORI, I have worked on projects that inform policy decisions made by various government departments. Throughout the year, I have conducted focus groups and interviews on sensitive issues like flooding that required patience and diplomacy to manage the often emotional respondents.

I maintain a healthy work-life balance, which enables me to remain focussed under pressure. Performance plays a big part in my life: at university, I was fully engaged in music and theatre, acting in multiple productions as well as singing in and managing a capella group. I also worked as camp counsellor in Canada in the summers of 2006 and 2007, honing my leadership skills by engaging teenagers and peers in a new theatrical programme I had devised.

Commented [JL1]: I wanted to start my personal statement with a story. It's all very well having the academic credentials, but what I really wanted to demonstrate was that I was compassionate and understood the 'emotional' side of what medicine often entails.

In hindsight, I wish I had thought of a way round using a rather cringe-worthy quote!

Commented [JL2]: Here, I started my story. In a narrative, I explained how I had made the decision to apply for GM from a background in chemistry. I thought that it would be important to back these apparent revelations up with work experience.

Commented [JL3]: If you come from a science background, don't go in to too much detail about all the fancy stuff you did in your first degree. They want clinical significance, not a detailed explanation. You need to be able to communicate your (often complex) ideas simply.

Commented [JL4]: Again, I tried to show that I didn't just care about the chemistry!

Commented [JL5]: It is essential to demonstrate a time commitment to medically-related things. It doesn't even need to be fancy!

Commented [JL6]: An appreciation of wider issues around disease is also important. Try and weave in lessons from your work experience that show you appreciate the wider social contexts of what you were doing.

Commented [JL7]: In this paragraph, I've tried to demonstrate that I understand what it takes to be a doctor by referring to what I've learnt during work experiences, backed up by specific examples.

Commented [JL8]: Also part of the wider narrative, I've had to demonstrate that the job I had after university was a useful insight in to people and thus somehow relevant to medicine.

Commented [JL9]: If I had had more space, I would have gone in to much greater detail about extra-curricular activities. I think this gives you the chance to show who you really are.