FIRST YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS

This fall, staff reporter Diana Fishlock tracked the challenging journey of first-year medical students at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. These aspiring doctors face sleepless nights memorizing thousands of facts about the human body, impossibly difficult exams and unbelievable stress. Several midstaters are among the class of 144 first-year students at the Hershey Medical Center. Their stories are inside.
Medical students find first year challenging, rewarding

BY DIANA FISCHLOCK
Of the Patriot News

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everal midstate residents are among the 144 first-year students at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. Here are their stories:

KARA YE KYUNG KWON

Kara Ye Kyung Kwon speaks Korean, Spanish and English.

In high school she wanted to be a professional violinist. At Juniata College she was a concert-master for four years. She had a chemistry and physics double major then switched to theater and biochemistry.

“I never thought about medicine,” said Kwon, 21, of Upper Allen Twp.
She decided she wanted a career that would make her life fulfilling. Then she started volunteering at a hospital, then landed a clinical research job one summer. “I realize this is what I wanted to do.”

Kwon is still exploring what kind of medicine she wants to practice.

“It’s hard to know now because you meet different physicians and you’re like ‘Oh, that sounds interesting.’”

“You don’t really know how something is until you’re doing it,” she said. “I have so many interests in different things, I don’t know. It might change. Who knows? I’m a natural curiosity type.”

Kwon has applied to the Navy. She said. She likes traveling and would enjoy helping healthy people who want to become better. She said, “I think it would be awesome to help people who are helping the country.”

It’s a privilege to attend medical school, Kwon said.

“This is so fascinating what we learn,” she said. “It’s exhilarating.”

MATT PAVELIC

Matt Pavelic, 26, had planned to be a teacher like both of his parents.

He had planned to play football like his dad and grandfather. But injuries planned his Penn State football career. There were the countless separated shoulders, dockers of surgeries, painful ulcers running down his neck to his fingers after tackles, a fractured wrist, broken leg and a blood clot.

Pictures of Pavelic in the hospital make up entire chapters of the family scrapbooks. There are close-ups of his incisions and pores with nurses. His senior year, Pavelic, a Hampden Twp. resident, wore a coach’s shirt instead of a player’s jersey. He spent the season coaching the practice offense as an undergraduate assistant. A kinesiology major, he worked as a personal trainer before deciding on a career in medicine.

“I was waiting for different opportunities for grad assistant positions around the country. I thought of what my career would be like and I decided what I really wanted. He realized medicine would combine his true interests in anatomy, physiology and working with people.”

He loves medical school, Pavelic said.

“One way you’re surrounded by people who have the same interests, so your life doesn’t seem that out of whack,” he said. “We have to do it, but we’re all in it together and we make time to balance ourselves out.”

He is leaning toward sports medicine but finds surgery fascinating too.

Pavelic watched a surgery that was supposed to take four hours but stretched out to 20 hours.

“You go in with a plan and then you have to create a new plan of attack and carry it out. That was amazing,” he said.

ANDREW HULME

When Andrew Hulme was a sophomore at Dickinson College, he decided to study medicine.

“My grandfather was a doctor in Lebanon,” said Hulme, 23, of Lebanon. “I could see he was happy with what he did, so I wanted to try.”

His grandfather, a family physician, would tell Hulme stories about his work.

He died a few years ago.

Hulme started shadowing doctors to get experience.

“Every experience I had made me feel like it was the right decision,” he said. “It combined science, disease, getting to know people and what they’re thinking and feeling. And it’s something different every day.”

The Hulme, Hershey’s location was a big factor.

His family lives 20 minutes away, so Hershey still kind of feels like home, he said. He’s glad he’s not living in a city.

“It’s nice to have my parents close by as a support system. Sometimes they take me out to eat or give me a home-cooked meal,” he said.

Still, in medical school, there’s so much to learn that it’s easy to lose touch with the world outside, he said.

KRISTEN ZAMIETRA

Kristen Zamieta has a great support system.

She lives at home in Derry Twp. with her parents and her dog.

“It’s nice to not have to worry about going to the grocery store and making dinner,” said Zamieta, 22.

“Lucky my home is two miles from here,” she said one day at the medical center. "I'm here almost all the time anyway, I don't think I'm missing out on anything."".

Gross anatomy class has been difficult, but not as hard as she had feared, Zamieta said.

“I think I had these doomed thoughts going into it, I study a lot and study more than I ever had before, but I do get deep at night,” she said.

While taking a life sciences class in middle school, Zamieta realized she wanted to practice medicine. “I really like being around people, and I like to problem-solve,” she said.

Like most of the students, she is not sure yet what specialty she might end up in. In their third year, the students will explore specialties.

“T have always been interested in pediatrics,” she said. “They have so much joy and I felt that would be a great atmosphere to be in everyday. Even though they’re sick and in pain, they’re not as unhappy when they’re sick.”

In the meantime, there’s lots of learning to do.

“I didn’t have any real idea of where I would end up,” she said. “But I’m glad I’m here.”

NATHAN KELLER

Identical twins Nathan and Matt Keller, 23, both ended up at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center by coincidence, they said.

“We both independently decided we wanted to go into medicine,” Nathan said.

They grew up in Schuylkill Twp., Lebanon County and graduated from Eastern Lebanon County High School and Bucknell University.

They hadn’t planned to go to the same medical school. It just worked out that way.

“It was just the best option for both of us,” Nathan said.

But now that they’re both here, they live together and study together because they’re best friends, he said.

“We kind of get intense.”

There are advantages to being a twin because they can compare notes, Nathan said.

They don’t compete against each other, Matt said.

“We share pretty much everything with each other. It’s good in medical school because you can’t possibly do everything yourself... We try to work as independently as possible, but we both have faith in each other’s work.”

Nathan wanted to be a doctor after his grandfather had quadruple bypass surgery when the boys were in high school, he said. “That gave me a lot of respect for what doctors do, and that maybe I could touch someone else’s life the way someone touched ours.”

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