

# FORESIGHT 30/30

Ashley Kreher, Class of 2019

Thirty sets of eyes, 30 smiles, and 30 inquisitive minds met mine one brisk January morning. As I, a medical student, and three of my peers looked out from the front of the classroom to teach these 30 excited third grade students about the dangers of tobacco, little did I know that they would be teaching me instead. I didn't know what to expect my first day, but like any other encounter I kept my mind open. Some had answers for every question we asked, some had to be encouraged or offered the opportunity to say their opinion, while others opened their minds to ask some of the hardest questions, questions that, at times, left me thinking. It wasn't until my last day at Gilchrist Elementary that I realized that every time I opened the front doors of the school I was meeting my future patients. I wasn't taking their histories, or listening to their hearts, I was instead exercising the art of medicine which is found in humanism. I listened, I explained, I answered questions, and I taught. Not every word or slide met every child's mind like a switch turning on a light bulb. Instead, questions offered clarity and confusion was met with explanation. Some listened, others wanted to see and some wanted to undergo an experience. Comments such as: "My parents smoke even though I ask them to stop, what should I do?" "My dad is in the hospital because he smokes," and "What can I do so I don't get sick from my parents' cigarette smoke?" still resonate with me today, much like the first time I smelled that searing cloud that came from my own uncle's lips after he puffed on that thin Marlboro stick.

Like each of these students, not every patient will understand why you are offering them information or what you are trying to say, but as a physician we have the

responsibility to pave a path that allows them to make the choice about what direction they want to take. Every patient that you encounter will be different; they may superficially appear similar, but upon a closer look, each has characteristics all their own. While I provided the message that smoking is dangerous, and that it damages your body and wallet, I knew that not every child who left that room wouldn't touch a cigarette in the future, even though I hoped against it. As doctors and educators we are responsible for supplying the tools for our patients to live the healthiest lives that they are capable of. Not every patient will take your advice to heart, nor will they care for what you have to say, but in the end there are patients who will. When we departed from Gilchrist, I realized that not all 30 of those eyes will see the importance, not all 30 of those smiles will remain after we leave, and not all 30 of those minds will remain steadfast against tobacco. I do know that if even one of those minds felt something after our presentation or held on to something that they will carry through their years, our mission was met. That each and every day the words that you say and the actions you display impact every life around you. That taking the time to offer your knowledge can and will make a difference. It may not be immediate and frustration is inevitable, but in the end it is not about you, it is about your patients. Medicine, no matter the specialty, is a lifestyle centered on each and every life that graces ours, the hands we'll hold during trying times, the experiences we'll share and the relationships we'll build with our patients who will eventually become our family.

At the end of my time at Gilchrist, I, along with my colleagues, saw almost 300 students and presented our programs to 10 classes. The week after our last presentation, I discovered an envelope in my mailbox. Within that envelope poured a handful of letters, letters from the students that I had the privilege to meet. They were inscribed with statements such as "Thank You" and "You might have inspired me to be a doctor." This experience wasn't just something I thought I needed, but it was something that these students needed as well. It was a glimpse into my future, and gave me the privilege to realize that even though there will be times of frustration, times of resistance, and times when you feel like you are at a standstill, everything that you do and say will matter. That you have the opportunity to influence how a patient thinks, feels, and comprehends. The results may not be immediate, but in the end you'll make a difference.



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