

One Medical Student's Thoughts on Change By Brian Zylinski, OMS-II

There's no question that change can be difficult, even for the most adaptable people among us. But just because change can be hard doesn't make it wrong. Sometimes in life, not getting what we want, as disappointing as it can be initially, can be the biggest blessing any of us can possibly ask for.

I've known that I've wanted to be a physician for many years. The first time I applied to medical school, I applied to only a small handful of schools, most of them within a few hours of my hometown of Buffalo, New York. After I didn't get accepted anywhere the first time around, my pre-med advisor suggested I reapply to a greater number of medical schools spread out over a much broader geographic area. Her suggestion proved to be very well-founded. The second time around, I was accepted to one (and only one) school: UNECOM.

Initially, the prospect of going to UNECOM terrified me. I had lived in the Buffalo area for the first twenty-three years of my life, and I was very nervous about leaving my family, my friends, and an area I was familiar with to go to medical school in an area I'd never been to before and where I didn't know anyone from Adam. I'll admit that, as I embarked on the grueling nine-hour move from Buffalo to Biddeford for the first time, I was scared, lonely, angry, and deeply regretful that I didn't get accepted somewhere closer to home. In short, I was a wreck.

Now, looking back almost two years later, it's hard to believe I felt the emotions I initially felt about UNECOM. I can't possibly imagine having gone to a medical school with a more supportive environment than the one I have here. The relationships that I have here with my colleagues, my professors, and members of the community are unbelievably fulfilling and more than enough to help me forget the occasional nostalgia I feel about home (although I've still remained close with my family and friends back in Buffalo). When I look to the future, I'm filled with nothing but optimism because of how well my experience at UNECOM has set me up for success: not just professionally, but in every aspect of my life. So while my medical school plans may not have worked out the way I had initially wanted them to, they worked out nonetheless, and probably far better than my naïve, pre-medical school self could've possibly fathomed.

One of my most compelling experiences during my time at UNECOM thus far happened earlier this year when I was interviewing an applicant for our Class of 2020. The applicant was a former minor league hockey player who was forced to give up his lifelong dream of playing in the NHL due to a career-ending concussion. During the interview, I was mystified when he told me his concussion was "the best thing that ever happened to him." However, he then went on to elaborate that, in spite of how debilitating his injury was (and continues to be), it ignited a passion within him for concussion research, and he had numerous publications on the subject in some highly prestigious journals at the time of his UNECOM interview. He insisted that his "new

dream” was to be a dedicated and compassionate neurologist who can help people who are suffering from the long-lasting effects of concussions like he is. While this particular applicant has decided to attend a different medical school, I’m fully confident that he’s capable of making this happen. As painful and heartbreaking as giving up hockey was, without his experience, he never would’ve discovered his true calling in life: medicine. And although he was (and still is) very passionate about hockey, he envisions his career in medicine being far more rewarding than any professional hockey career he ever could’ve dreamed of.

I still struggle with embracing change, but I’m getting better at it, slowly but surely. I hope that, if you struggle with embracing change too (or even if you’re a pro at it), you enjoyed and got something out of these stories. I’m sure you have a good handful of your own as well, either from your personal life experiences or stories you’ve heard from others. Just remember (and I’ll do my best to remind myself, too) there’s always more than one road that’ll take you to your dreams. And sometimes the back roads we take on the way to our dreams are far more beautiful than the highway...