As a first year medical student assisting in orthopaedics research, my jaw dropped when I reviewed x-rays of a young woman who had sustained spinal-pelvic dissociation in a motorcycle collision. As I studied her injury and post-operative films, I wondered what had become of her. I had the privilege of finding out that summer: when she returned to clinic for her 6-month follow-up appointment she rose from her wheelchair and gingerly took a few steps down the hall. Witnessing transformations like this dramatically demonstrated the positive impact that orthopaedics has on patients’ lives.

My interest in orthopaedics evolved naturally from my undergraduate engineering training. While fascinated with the challenges of biomedical engineering, I found myself constantly drawn to the clinical problems in question. As a research assistant my first year of medical school, I realized that orthopaedics provided the perfect combination of technical issues and patient care that I was seeking in my career. As my medical education progressed, however, I also became acutely aware of healthcare issues not directly related to the doctor-patient interaction. In my third year, I engaged in a groundbreaking project to systematically examine medical education and its complements and conflicts with patient care. This tracking method serves as both an educational aid for health care providers of all levels, as well as a tool for institutions to ensure compliance with mandates from the ACGME and Institute of Medicine.

Using quality issues as a springboard, I began to delve further into the economic and financial challenges facing the health care industry. Taking a leave of absence after my third year, I pursued an MBA, with the aim of acquiring the tools necessary to investigate and address issues within the broader healthcare environment. It struck me that physicians and administrators, the principal actors within the healthcare milieu, often had very different goals for hospitals. Indeed, it seemed that they often did not even speak the same language to one another. Bridging the divide between physicians and managers is absolutely imperative in solving the complex multi-factorial problems facing our healthcare system. My primary goal for the next step of my training is to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to become the most technically proficient surgeon I can; I hope to utilize my vantage point as a practicing orthopaedic surgeon with financial acumen to effect positive future change in our healthcare system.

I have enjoyed a wide-ranging education spanning many fields, and have yet to find myself drawn to anything quite like I am to orthopaedics. The rare combination of cerebral stimulation, technical execution, and opportunity to participate in research has engaged me at several points in my fledgling career. Wielding surgery’s instruments of knowledge, compassion, and technical skill, I look forward to daily challenges whether in clinic, the operating room, on in the field as a leader in tackling systemic issues facing our healthcare system.