

Andrew Kelly Scholarship Submission

September 28th, 2015. The day that changed my life forever. It ended like a dream come true, playing in my first football game for the varsity team and playing well. However, the elation was cut short on the ride home by a splitting headache. The next day I knew I had a concussion, there was no doubt about it. What came after is what I never could have expected, that same concussion ruptured an arachnoid cyst in my brain, sending me on a downward spiral towards eleven brain surgeries and a still unresolved chronic illness that leaves me battling severe headaches every moment of every day. How did I make it here? How could I make something positive out of it? I was lost and my whole entire world was spinning around me, missing almost 200 days of high school. I felt a yearning deep within myself to make all of this worth it, but I knew that would be a tall task.

I turned my focus towards medicine during my junior year of high school, applying to the University of Pittsburgh Health Career Scholars Academy (UPHCSA) to learn more about the field that I now craved to enter. If I was interested in the field of medicine before attending UPHCSA, I was obsessed with it by the time I left. I had experiences there which solidified my goal of one day becoming a neurosurgeon, including the opportunity to shadow a neurosurgeon at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and get a feel for the environment in the operating room. The atmosphere was addicting. I can still close my eyes and experience the perfect cross between calm, nervousness, and excitement that flowed through my veins when I stepped into the OR to observe the very surgeries I had undergone as a patient.

When it came to apply to college, my decision was easy. The University of Pittsburgh has an incredible undergraduate neuroscience program as well as a network of hospitals which receive a large amount of funding, allowing me to get involved in research projects pertaining to neuroscience. This would simply not be attainable at most other universities. My freshman year

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at Pitt was difficult as I struggled to find a way to treat my headaches, I continue to learn how to best deal with my illness and be the best student I can be every single day while facing odds that would be insurmountable for others. Despite all of these struggles, I completed my freshman year with a GPA near 3.5, with the intention of officially declaring my major in neuroscience this coming fall. As I focus on my academics, I have also attained research positions on two research projects which are doing fascinating work. The BRiTE program is doing work with elderly people who suffer from mild to moderate dementia and attempting to rehabilitate/slow the progress of their illness. They are the first program of their kind in the United States. I work there as a student worker inputting data and assisting members with their daily classes. Additionally, I have been accepted to work at the Brain Trauma Research Center this coming fall, doing the type of work that I hope to one day be leading in a lab of my own, studying the types of issues that I myself have faced.

The past three years of my life have been more physically and emotionally demanding than I ever could have imagined. I have faced fear, doubt, and rejection from some of the best doctors in the entire country. However, it has not all been for nothing. Many nights I have laid awake at night simply asking, "Why would this happen me?", and through my passion for neuroscience I have found an answer. With that passion for neuroscience, I have found an opportunity at a university with one of the top programs in the country and put myself in a position to succeed because of my desire to enter the field.