



David Nair – Third Year Medicine – Undergraduate 2016

1. *Why did you choose your degree programme, and what made you enrol at the University of Otago?*

Jeremiah 29:11 “*For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”*. Coming out of high school I had my mind set on heading to AUT to study physiotherapy. Why? Because it was close to home, it was automatic entry into the course (not having to go through health science first year), my older brother had previously gone to that University, and I had a keen interest in sport and was fascinated in the role a physiotherapist plays in rehabilitation for athletes.

But the Lord had other plans for me. I was not accepted into the halls of residence at AUT but was fortunate enough to gain preferential entry into Arana College here at Otago University. Looking back, I think the Lord was trying to push me, trying to make me believe more in myself and my abilities, trying to get me to think more about what I could do for others, rather than focusing solely on physiotherapy as a link to sport. Thus began my journey through Health Sciences at the University of Otago.

I came to Otago, maintaining the ambition of getting into physiotherapy. Again, this was because I was putting barriers in front of myself. I kept telling myself that I wasn't capable of getting into the other courses, that I wasn't “smart enough” to achieve any higher.

Within weeks of arriving at Arana College, my mind set changed. I got the opportunity to meet so many amazing people, people that did not have these doubts, instead positive ambitions for what they could achieve. Likewise, I was privileged to be involved in PIHPSA (Pacific Islands Health Professionals Students Association) and the POPO (Pacific Orientation at Otago) mentoring programme run by PIRSSU (Pacific Islands Research and Student Support Unit), which exposed me to a range of successful Pacific Island senior students throughout all of the health professional courses. Being exposed to the environment at Arana College and having the support and inspiration of peers from POPO and PIHPSA, I started to believe that I could achieve more. This led me to my new goal of obtaining entry into Medicine.

However, my poor work ethic and late night cramming before tests and exams, did not balance with my new found belief and intentions. This reflected in my grades, and by the end of the first semester I knew that I needed to work a lot harder for medicine to be a reality.

I finished the next semester with the focus of developing my study technique, improving my work ethic, time management and surrounding myself with people who I could learn from. In comparison to first semester, my grades improved markedly and my attitude towards study changed. I stopped treating study as a chore and instead it became something that I really enjoyed.

Come the end of the year I was offered a place in physiotherapy, but was unsuccessful in my attempts at medicine.

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I spent the summer trying to make the decision between taking the offer from physiotherapy, or to continue through the OSMS (Otago School of Medical Sciences) and try again for medicine via the postgraduate pathway.

After much consultation with family and the support staff at PIRSSU I chose the latter option and entered into a Bachelors of Biomedical Science. The main reason for heading down this pathway was based around; **Corinthians 10:13** “*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*” I truly felt that the Lord had tempted me with this dream and that he would not let it waiver. I think He wanted to challenge me through the struggle of health science, so that I would become a stronger person and develop the ideal of service to our people. He did this by exposing me to many Pacific Leaders who talked about the needs of our communities, the initiatives currently in place and the work that is needed to be done to benefit our people.

I chose to major in Functional Human Biology as this gave me a broad core of papers to choose from and played to my strengths and interests of physiology, anatomy, biochemistry and nutrition.

The next two years of this degree were a huge undertaking. I had to continue adapting my time management skills, organisation, motivation, work ethic and study techniques to achieve my end goal of medicine. I can say that those two years put me in some dark places mentally. It forced me to persevere and built up my resiliency. Not only has this experience deepened my understanding of who I am and what I am capable of achieving, it also strengthened my knowledge of the human body and ultimately my desire to get into medicine.

I have now graduated with a Bachelor of Biomedical Science, majoring in Functional Human Biology (graduation is the most amazing time for you and your family!) and I am proud to say that my grades improved with each year of study.

This time round, applying for professional courses was a lot more nerve racking. In the back of my head I kept thinking, what if I don't make it this time, where would I go to next? Trying to put that aside, I was feeling confident that the growth I had been through and the hard work I had put in would get me there.

I gained entrance into physiotherapy, and was on the waiting list for dentistry and medicine. I started to look at other options but I did not let go of the hope of medicine.

Having no idea what chances I would have or when I would hear a yes or a no, put a large strain on me mentally and was a heavy burden for my family to bear also.

Much time had passed and I had almost given up on getting in this time round. I had applied and was accepted into the Postgraduate Diploma of Public Health and was set on following this path.

Philippians 4:13 “*I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.*” I will never forget Friday the 13th of February 2015. The day I was offered a place in Medicine, just a few days before the course began. This day and the next few following were highly emotional. My friends, family and support staff

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who had shared this journey with me, were filled with pride and excitement. My phone was going off every minute from people sending their congratulations and happiness.

I will never forget what that day signifies. Three years of personal development, hard work and many ups and downs, for me to reach this achievement. For me it highlighted how much faith and support have played a part in my journey. The happiness this day brought will be a part of my motivation to do my absolute best in medicine, so that I can have the ability to help our Pacific Communities in whatever way the Lord has planned for me.

2. *What have you enjoyed most about your academic journey thus far?*

- Meeting new people from around the country and the world
- Strengthening my faith
- Going through the hard times so that I could develop as a person and a student
- Finding subjects that I really enjoyed to learn about

3. *So far during your studies what key relationships have mattered the most? What key sources of support have you encountered at the University of Otago?*

- Family: keeping in regular contact with them and sharing what I was going through helped. My parents always had helpful advice to get me through any situation I was faced with.
- Friends: having a small tight knit group of friends who I could rely on was hugely important. Being so far away from home you need people who can support you. I was lucky to have a few people going through the same pathway as me, as well as flatmates and other friends who were already in medicine, who I could always lean on when I needed. I think it was important to have friends that were doing a range of course at University so that home life varied from study and kept me balanced.
- PIRSSU: the academic support and general guidance the staff here offer has been a huge part of my journey and the achievements I have made.
- PIHPSA: Being part of this team of leaders grounded me and gave me a sense of community.
- Continued involvement in POPO as a mentor also helped me. Telling my mentees about ways to study and work ethic kept me motivated. It was like a walk the talk experience, I couldn't tell my mentees one thing about being a good student and not do it myself.

4. *What are some of your career and/or academic goals and aspirations?*

- Looking to the future I am thinking about heading into Paediatrics.
 - I really enjoy working with children.
 - Being able to have a small influence on a child's life, so that they could live more freely and experience the world like every other child would be special.
 - Many of our Pacific youth experience preventable, treatable and manageable infections, mental disorders or other disabilities. I'd like to be a part of implementing change in these statistics.
 - Having the chance to work with our Pacific families to benefit our next generation, just as those who came before me took time to invest in my life and development.
- For similar reasons, becoming a general practitioner interests me as it gives the chance to develop relationships with families and hopefully prevent illnesses becoming more serious.

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5. What advice would you give to new students?

James 1:3-4 *"When your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it...For when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything"*

Struggles are a part of life, they make you stronger. They force you to be resourceful and adapt to get through.

As Nelson Mandela said.....*"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."*

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

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