

Student Name and Contact Information: Claire Elyse Kakac

Project Title: Northwestern Medicine Pre-Med Internship Program

Program Location: Northwestern Medical Center: Chicago, Illinois

Program Timetable: June 13 – August 6, 2024

Summary of the Experience: During my summer internship at Northwestern Medicine, one of the most rewarding aspects was the opportunity to observe the stark contrast between rural and urban healthcare settings. Coming from a rural background, I had previously experienced the benefits of personalized care in smaller communities, but this internship exposed me to the complexities of urban healthcare, where patient demographics such as race, income, and geography significantly affect health outcomes. This broader perspective allowed me to see the challenges of providing care in a diverse, fast-paced environment and the value of efficiency, resource management, and interdepartmental collaboration. Building relationships with healthcare providers, who served as mentors, further enriched my experience, helping me gain insight into both clinical care and the corporate side of medicine. Additionally, I was able to witness the full spectrum of patient care through my time in the surgery department, from diagnosis and treatment planning to post-operative follow-up, deepening my understanding of the patient care continuum.

The internship also contributed significantly to my academic and professional development. Through clinical observation and research on Botulinum Toxin A (BoNT-A) for chronic pelvic pain under the mentorship of Dr. Amy Halverson, I gained hands-on experience in evidence-based medicine and research processes. This experience not only expanded my clinical knowledge but also underscored the importance of research in improving patient care. Moving forward, these experiences have ignited a passion for bridging the gap between rural and urban healthcare access. I plan to pursue a career focused on providing equitable healthcare to diverse populations, driven by my desire to advocate for high-quality care regardless of geographic or socioeconomic barriers. My mentorship relationships will continue to shape my journey in medicine, and I am eager to explore surgical specialties and medical research further as I work toward becoming a physician.

Learning Achievement: Growing my knowledge of healthcare delivery in various contexts has been a significant benefit of my internship at Northwestern Medicine for my academic career. My early understanding of healthcare was influenced by the reality of individualized, resource-constrained care that is typical in smaller communities because I was raised in a rural area.

Working at a big urban teaching hospital gave me the opportunity to see firsthand how a variety of variables, including geographic location, racial background, and socioeconomic position, impact patient access to care and health outcomes in a more complicated and varied environment. Having direct experience with these differences highlighted how critical it is to comprehend the socioeconomic determinants of health and the necessity of individualized care plans that cater to the particular requirements of various patient groups. I became familiar with the difficulties of providing healthcare to a varied patient group with a wide range of medical disorders in an urban setting.

My awareness of the flexibility and resiliency needed in all healthcare environments has grown as a result of this experience, which has also improved my comprehension of how healthcare is provided in various settings. It enriched my medical education and widened my view on healthcare delivery by teaching me that adaptability and speedy decision-making are essential in handling the intricate and varied demands of patients.

The further development of my academic foundation through clinical observation and research was another significant benefit of my internship. I was given a thorough educational opportunity by being assigned to the surgery department, which blended practical research work with exposure to real-world clinical settings. I was able to gain an understanding of the whole range of patient care by watching patients in the clinic and operating room, from diagnosis and treatment planning to surgical intervention and post-operative follow-up.

This experience helped me bridge the gap between what I learned in the classroom and how to use it in real life by providing an essential context for the knowledge I have learned in my studies. Furthermore, I learned a great deal about the research process—from developing hypotheses and designing studies to gathering and analyzing data—through my research on the effects of Botulinum Toxin A (BoNT-A) on chronic idiopathic pain in the pelvic floor, which I conducted under the guidance and help of Dr. Amy Halverson. It also emphasized the value of research in improving patient care and the application of evidence-based practice in medicine. This experience has significantly enriched my education by providing insights that extend beyond the classroom, preparing me to navigate the diverse challenges of the medical field with greater confidence and competence.

Program Strengths: The Northwestern Pre-Med internship provided invaluable experience and improved my understanding of the medical field and profession. One of the main strengths of the program was that it provided a holistic understanding of the medical profession. It provided valuable opportunities for clinical exposure, allowing the interns to observe patient care and medical procedures in real-world healthcare settings. It also offered access to mentorship from experienced healthcare professionals, providing guidance and career advice. Interns also gained hands-on experience in evidence-based medicine, while rotating through various specialties to explore different fields of interest. The internship also deepened my understanding of how

socioeconomic factors impact healthcare delivery, enhanced communication and teamwork, and fostered personal and professional growth. , The program ultimately helps to clarify career goals and strengthen medical school applications.

Program Shortcoming: The program is outstanding, but if I had to highlight a shortcoming, it would be its relatively short duration. In such a brief period, interns may only gain a surface-level understanding of clinical processes, patient care, and hospital operations, making it challenging to develop a thorough grasp of how healthcare systems function. While Northwestern Medicine provides broad exposure to its large and complex environment, the experience can lack the depth needed to fully explore the intricacies of the medical field.

Impact: The experiences I gained during my internship at Northwestern Medicine have significantly shaped my aspirations for the future and will profoundly impact the next few years of my career. Having seen firsthand the differences between rural and urban healthcare delivery, I am more committed than ever to pursuing a career that bridges the gap between these two environments. I have developed a passion for advocating for equitable healthcare access, regardless of a patient's background or geographic location, and this perspective will guide my future studies and clinical rotations. In the coming years, I plan to seek out opportunities that allow me to continue exploring the complexities of healthcare delivery in both urban and rural settings. I intend to focus on gaining a well-rounded understanding of how different factors affect patient outcomes and access to care. This understanding will be essential as I work towards becoming a physician who is equipped to provide compassionate, high-quality care to diverse patient populations. The relationships I formed with healthcare professionals during my internship will also play a crucial role in my career development. The mentorship and guidance I received from doctors, nurses, and other providers have provided me with a solid foundation to build upon as I navigate the complexities of medical training. I plan to maintain these relationships throughout my journey into medicine, as they offer invaluable insights and support that will be essential in helping me achieve my career goals.

Furthermore, my experience in the surgery department, notably my research under Dr. Halverson, has sparked a more profound interest in surgical specialties and medical research. I have come to appreciate the importance of surgical intervention in improving patient outcomes and the role of research in advancing medical knowledge. This experience has inspired me to explore these areas further, and I plan to seek out opportunities to continue learning and gaining experience in both clinical and research settings.

Overall, my experiences this summer have prepared me to enter the field of medicine with a balanced perspective, a network of invaluable mentors, and a commitment to making a positive impact on patient care across different settings. I know the skills, knowledge, and

insights I have gained during this internship will be instrumental in shaping my future career and in helping me become the physician I aspire to be.