



Welcome to the Pre-Med Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Dan. Today, I'm asking a listener question about how easy was it to maintain a relationship with my girlfriend during the pre-med years and during

medical school. I want to first point out a couple of important life tips regarding choosing your mate, if you're not already in a bond, because I can think of a few specific examples where I tried to date somebody or I was meeting somebody, trying to evaluate whether or not I wanted to be in a relationship with somebody when I was an undergrad, and I can remember a few choice quotes or experiences that happened that clearly pointed out that this was not the right person for me.

Sometimes, it's easier to point out what's not working rather than really being totally assured in what is. I can remember one specific instance where I was talking to a female and she found out that I was pre-med and wanted to go to medical school and she made the comments, "Oh I guess you would make a terrible boyfriend then.", but it was kind of funny but I was glad she said it because it told me what was on her mind. That's a very self-centered comment to make.

I took from that and other lessons in life that if I'm really sure about a path and I know that the Pre-Med Podcast and Medical School Podcast listeners are deadset on becoming physicians by and large. Some of them, their spark to going to medical school gets restarted by listening to the sound of my mesmerizing voice, right? I get emails like that every week. I'm not just being silly. I know yourselves, you're a very inspired group of people.

Well, if you're trying to date someone and they don't share that support with you, they can be a distracting thing. I think it's safe to say that if you're not already in a committed relationship and you're playing the field or shopping around, don't rush it obviously, but if that person is not going to be able to help you with your journey or support you through the ups and downs of a medical education, then you can look at it like that person's not the right one for you.

If you feel driven towards this path of going into medicine, then you're looking for things to fall in place. They don't always for us, but when it comes to choosing a mate in life, it's important that that person be a support help for you, and even if they don't

necessarily want to choose a medical education path, if they love you, they can demonstrate that by their actions.

I will point out there, the love is not just emotion or infatuation or eroticization, anything like that. Love is a sustained, committed course of action that you're going to be by someone's side and support them and taking interest in their interests. That is a healthy relationship if you have nothing else. Of course, I'll throw God in there for sure, but if you've got a relationship built on those principles where you're looking out for each other, then it's not going to become a needy game of me, me and me and self-centeredness.

I was fortunate to have found a girlfriend while still a pre-med that shared that interest and was supportive, but we didn't talk about it a whole lot and so I'll get to the actual question now, "How easy was it to maintain that relationship in undergrad?" We got married and I can talk about the medical school part too, but in undergrad, it was pretty easy. The only downside is premeds might be just a little bit busier than other types of students, but that's not always the case. I did happen to have a job where I worked every weekend for 2 1/2 years. That was hard on a relationship.

Every time I wasn't getting a page or a call, we would go out and I would see her. I would see her during the weekday in the evening most of the time. That was how it was done, and not everyday. A premed's not going to get to go on a date every night. This principle will hold true during medical school also, and that is we have to set aside scheduled date nights, even if you're just making a good faith attempt to do that, your significant other will appreciate the spirit of that that you value the relationship, you value the time together and that you know you're busy and while you make no apologies for your chosen career path, you also understand that this is an important life-long adventure and investment in your relationship, that early from the beginning as a premed, you are going to prioritize alone time spent together on date night, at least that one night per week that you're going to go out together.

There were times in undergrad that college got busier and I wasn't able to see her as much as I wanted to. I can remember one example where I was taking 17 science hours as a senior, I think, and about 11 or 12 of them were premed prerequisites. It was my

hardest semester as an undergrad and I was working hard and I was managing okay, but then towards the end, within the last two weeks when finals were really kicking up, we found out on one of these courses, that the way the professor was going to be grading the final exam was totally different than his syllabus said. He was going to make a comprehensive final exam on all the material we had learned, and I had not been prepping or refreshing on all the stuff in the beginning of the semester.

What this really meant was about 15 hours of extra study time or something, and I had about a week's notice, on top of the final exams for all the other hours of science courses that I was taking. It was insane so I just called my girlfriend at the time when I found that out, explained to her my frustration with this and what this meant that I had to do was I basically said pull almost all-nighters and work late nights everyday for the rest of the semester, and then I apologized and said, "As soon as this is over, I'll see you."

Being true to herself and a good sign of the future potential of that relationship, she had nothing negative to say, just that, "Oh, okay no problem at all. Call me when you can." That's it, so easy. I know relationships aren't always that easy. I am just so blessed with the sweetest wife.

Just to patch up the rest of the story before I talk about the effect in medical school, I would like to say that I did not get in to medical school my first year, and I was pretty devastated, so I graduated with a degree in Biology, I could barely get a job. I took a job for \$9 an hour as a research assistant in a lab, but in the meantime, as soon as I got that rejection finalized, I started shopping around for Caribbean medical schools, and I got accepted to St. George's, and I was talking to some others I believe over the phone anyway. All I needed to do, I actually interviewed with the local doctor that had went to St. George's in the Caribbean.

I could have gone if I wanted to, and I started talking to my girlfriend about leaving and going to the Caribbean, and that was one day I don't think I'll ever forget. I was talking to her about that, kind of on my way out the door. I had to leave. I was leaving her place, and I just saw tears welling up in her eyes, and I just saw her and I realized the impact, how hard this was on her to be a premed, apply myself to all these programs in medical schools nationally

and now internationally, and the idea that really, if I had taken off to the Caribbean, I probably would not have really looked back.

I had that kind of commitment to medicine, and we weren't committed yet. I thought about that and I realized she didn't want me to leave. That's when I decided to propose and I surprised her and took her out to dinner and I talked to her dad first and all that stuff. I worked on that for a couple of months after that day and proposed to her and sat out that year and applied back for an American school and I got UT-Houston and had a great experience at that medical school.

That catches you up on the interim. Now let's get to the second part of your question, and that is, "How easy was it to maintain a relationship with my significant other in medical school?", and I will say it is significantly more challenging, very, very difficult. Probably the best picture I can paint of what it looks like on a day to day basis is basically you're locking yourself in your office or an extra bedroom, wherever you're studying. You don't come out much. You come out to eat and that's it.

Night after night, that really gets old, especially if you're not talking about the next time you meet together. You have to really prepare your spouse and your family and your friends that this is an around the clock commitment and I'm not going to be able to visit with you very much.

Probably the most social time is the week after exams are over. They usually come in cycles depending on the medical school curriculum and you can splurge. You want to plan your vacations out. This is a skill you'll develop in school and will carry with you into your career as a physician, and that is that you're going to have time constraints no matter what to do, and so to prevent burnout, an important thing is you're always planning your next time off, and you really stress it down and plan out the details, you've got some time.

What hotel are we going to get? What time do you think we're going to leave that day? Do we need to bring this or that? Make it granular. Even if it's 3 months away, you want to talk about those plans and always have something to look forward to. That will keep your head held high and then just sweet loving things, whether it's cards or flowers or little mementos to show your appreciation, and

just keep in mind that when you go to medical school, it's like your family or your girlfriend or your husband or wife, they're going with you.

Don't forget that. One of the biggest pitfalls that happens in relationships in premed, in medical school, is when the medical students, for obvious reasons, really feels like they're working so much harder than their spouse and when they come home, they can really minimize the stress on the significant other that's not in medical school. You might even have kids or they could have a job and it might be a 40-hour a week job compared to you studying 80 hours a week. That seems pretty normal and easy, but it's not, and you need to just come home, no matter how hard your day is at the medical school or whatever and put all your stuff down and go give your significant other a hug and say, "How was your day?", and then shut your mouth for 5 minutes.

That's the best piece of advice that I can give you for relationships. It really works, "How was your day?" They know they don't have to ask you how yours was, because yours is insane, and that answer holds true almost all the time, but their days can really vary from good to bad, so at least hear them out.

Have a date night, hear them out, respect the stress that they are going through. Prepare them ahead of time on how hard it's going to be, especially around exam times, plan your next outing and vacation, and I think your relationships will go well, especially if you have a spouse like I am and have a spouse that's supportive in that role and can come along with you for the ride.

You've been listening to the Pre-Med Podcast, I'm Dr. Dan.

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