**Reasons to Choose a Career in Surgery**

“You should share the passion and action of your time at the peril of being judged not to have lived.”  (1) To share the action and passion of an operating theatre is to experience life in brilliant focus. ‘A person is never the same after having been exposed to the purity of purpose found in the operating room. Pedestrian concerns of economic or recreational advantage, are swept aside with the privilege of saving a life.’  (2) The passion for a life in surgery begins by wanting to be part of that experience. Surgery is as viable, exciting, stimulating and rewarding speciality for young doctors and the surgical frontier is filled with seemingly limitless challenges and opportunities.

To be a surgeon is to stand, without flinching, in the sea of human suffering and use one’s entire resource of knowledge, skill and intelligence to battle it.  (3) Each day brings a unique experience and distinctive cases which require analysis, intense planning and extreme focus. However, they are approached with compassion, by a doctor who has a comprehensive understanding, and can relate to and support people. You arrive at the hospital and look, listen, palpate and percuss. Then you dissect, clamp, tie, cauterise, sew resect, anastomose and bypass.  (4) So that in the end, a person, broken by the struggles of life can have a few more moments as a complete individual. There is a unique bond between a patient and a surgeon that is not found in any other speciality, as the patient allows the surgeon to do something life-altering. If you are interested in a career that requires a lot of you and gives you even more in return, then surgery is for you.

It is undeniable that these are testing times for surgery. The educational process if often criticised for being too lengthy. The workhours during relevant residencies are extensive and stressful, leaving too little time for formal didactic teaching, individual study, family responsibilities and recreation. Consultants have been criticised for devoting too little time to the welfare for their trainees. Some are considered disinterested or abusive. Jobs are more difficult to find in both private and academic settings. Many practicing surgeons are disillusioned, contemplating early retirement or a career change and voicing their unhappiness to anyone who will listen.  (5) Why then, one might ask, would anyone still want to become a surgeon?

Whilst there are many challenges facing surgery, they are not unique to the specialty. Extensive studies comparing various specialities have not identified specialists who are clearly happier than the other.  (6) When you truly love your career the hours appear shorter. Your free time is limited so you use it wisely and although sacrifices are required, the end justifies the means. Furthermore, the Royal Australian College of Surgeons are pioneers of ‘the operate with respect’ campaign, and are leading the way to a safer workplace for all healthcare professionals. Ultimately other health professionals share certain frustrations; however, they will never experience the satisfaction that comes with caring for another human being, relieving and sometimes curing their pain and suffering through surgical interventions. This, I believe is one of the most precious skills one can acquire in a lifetime.

Surgeons are physicians first. “A knowledge of healthy and diseased actions is not less necessary to be understood than the principles of the other sciences. Without this knowledge one cannot be a surgeon.”  (7) However, surgery grew out of the need “to see” disease, and rather aimed to understand and conquer it. The men and women who developed surgery were
talented, driven and uniformly sought excellence in their profession. Their hearts were
touched with fire.

The past few decades in particular, have seen an integration of surgery and technology like no
other speciality. The fact that a human being can now be connected to an apparatus, have his
or her circulatory and respiratory functions performed by a machine for hours, have a major
cardiac condition corrected and remerge from anaesthesia physiologically intact is nothing
short of miraculous. Ground breaking realms in robotic technologies, artificial organs and
prosthesis likewise, promise an exciting future for surgery. When we think of how many
advances are yet to be uncovered, it stimulates our inventiveness, what an incredible time to
be a surgeon.

Surgery knows no boundaries. With the advent of interfaces surgeons can perform
interventional procedures on patients remote from the operating room. Africa, USA, Europe,
Asia, Australian Pacific, Antarctica! None can survive without the interventions surgeons
provide. Currently, surgically treatable conditions kill more people worldwide, than
Tuberculosis, Malaria and AIDS combined. (8) If you are seeking a career in which you can
make a global impact, then look no further than surgery.

As a surgeon, you become a unique leader who, inspires performance beyond expectations, as
opposed to simply being task based. To be a surgeon is to lead healthcare which will directly
impact on the quality of care delivered to patients whilst simultaneously running an operating
room, laboratory, coordinating an office, negotiating with hospital administrators, raising
funds for research and managing diverse personnel.

Finally, the surgeon is someone who endeavours to instruct the student beneath them and
advocates for lifelong learning. The surgeon imparts words of wisdom and strategies with
which they overcame the challenges which lie before them. They are responsible for
teaching decision making and technical skills while simultaneously demonstrating
professionalism and ethical principles. (9) As a surgeon, you shape the next generation and
the future of patient care.

If you are a medical student or doctor with intelligence, drive, stamina, who loves challenges,
hard work and positive outcomes, who is results- orientated, loves working with your hands
as well as your brain, and enjoys caring for others and interacting with highly competent
physicians and other health care professionals, you should be a surgeon. The practice of
medicine just doesn’t get any better than this. You don’t have to be the best in the world, but
you should be the best for the world. Be a surgeon.

Thank-you for taking the time to read my essay, and I hope that you are as inspired by
surgery as I.

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Bibliography

1. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. Dead, yet living: an address delivered at Keene, New Hampshire on Memorial day Boston, Massachusetts 1884.