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Tried & true: Medical practice

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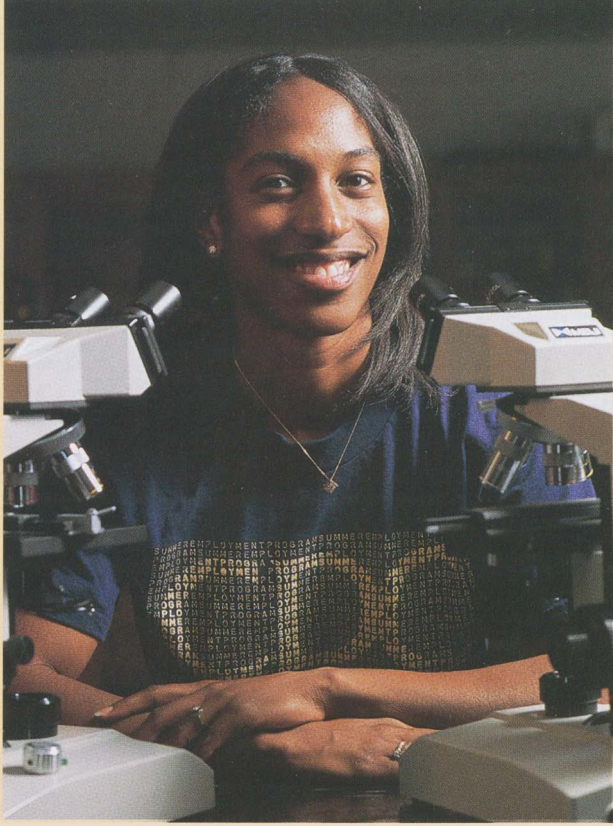
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Medical practice

Angela Highbaugh says she has always been interested in the field of medicine, but she points to an incident when she was in the ninth grade as a defining moment in her decision to pursue a medical career.

She had broken her arm and was in the hospital, sharing a room with a younger child. As she awaited treatment, Highbaugh recalls a doctor entering the room and informing her roommate's mother that because the family had no insurance, they would have to go elsewhere. The mother argued that she was insured but that the paperwork was unavailable and her husband, who could explain, was out of town. The doctor was unmoved, and the child was required to leave.

"I couldn't believe this sort of thing could happen, especially to a child," says Highbaugh, who received her Furman degree in mathematics this spring. "It made me realize how important it is for patients to feel that the doctor cares about treating them and not just their illness."

Highbaugh, who aspires to a career in pediatric medicine, begins pursuit of her goal this fall at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Ga. She believes she is well prepared for the challenge ahead; in addition to her coursework at Furman, she spent two summers as an intern at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Her job title was "office automation clerk," but Highbaugh says that the internship offered her access to doctors and medical personnel that might not have been available had she interned in a laboratory setting. She was able to accompany doctors on "grand rounds," attend sessions where outbreaks of diseases were discussed and analyzed, contribute to the investigation of an outbreak, and attend a public health conference featuring Nobel laureates.

"I'd had a lot of lab work at Furman," she says, "and I felt this type of position would allow me to talk more directly with the medical staff at CDC about what they did and how they did it. It was an opportunity to be involved in the medical field from a different perspective."

Many of the epidemiologists at CDC, she discovered, had started in pediatrics. "They were eager to help and to answer my questions," she says. "I saw in-depth what this aspect of medicine was like, and I had access to a huge library of medical texts and journals. The CDC looks out for its interns, and it was a wonderful way to make contacts in the field."

At Furman Highbaugh participated in a wide range of activities. An all-Southern Conference sprinter on the track team, where she specialized in the 400-meter dash, she was also president of the Student League for Black Culture, an academic tutor and a soup kitchen volunteer. She

was elected to *Who's Who* and to Senior Order, the honorary women's leadership organization.

Highbaugh says her athletic experience was, in many ways, an internship experience all its own. "You definitely learn to budget your time," she says, "but you also come to understand the value of being involved in something where you feel supported, where you believe someone's backing you. So it's important to be honest and to keep the lines of communication open.

"The same applies to medical school. If things become difficult, you need to recognize this and find help — and to be there for others if they're in a similar situation."

— Jim Stewart