

# COMMUNITY FOCUS

## Auston Stiefer



### Meet Auston Stiefer, MS3

#### *First Generation Medical Student*

You can find me running Riverside, attempting to craft the perfect latte, and veganizing my favorite recipes and baked treats!

I also am a huge language nerd - I majored in Spanish Lit, and love to read Latin American fiction, and am also currently brushing up on my French and Portuguese. Prior to the pandemic, this hobby fared well with my love of travel - in the last couple of years, I'd been to France, Brazil, and Mexico!

### What does being a doctor mean to you?

One of my niche interests is immigrant and refugee health, since it is an example of those larger themes I care most about in medicine. The lottery of birth, in this country as in all countries, allows some portions of society to be favored in terms of race, language, gender and sexual identity, and so forth, merely by sheer luck. Meanwhile, others are oppressed and often systemically denied adequate medical care along those same axes, and thus experience lower life expectancies due to that very same (lack of) luck. As a medical student also trained in medical interpretation, I hope to pursue a career as an academic clinician - not only providing bilingual care to immigrant populations, but also contributing to the work to better prepare the next generation of healthcare providers to serve the linguistically and culturally diverse populations we are charged with serving.

### What was a challenge you faced How did you overcome it?

My grandfather was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer during my first year of medical school, with a poor prognosis. Oddly enough, this happened roughly around the same time in our curriculum in which we were learning about pancreatic adenocarcinoma and other cancers of the gastrointestinal and hepatobiliary systems. It was strange and difficult to be a person in my family who was growingly asked medical questions in earnest for my opinions of my grandfather's medical care, and this mere act of being honest with my family about what I had learned and the large amount I still was clueless about was therapeutic in its own way. During this time, I found journaling and writing to be a helpful way of making sense of this strange experience, and I know look back on those months as a time where I grew tremendously as a future clinician. It's definitely affected how I interact with patients and families as a clinical student on rotations now.

### What advice would you give to your younger-self?

Allow yourself to be surprised by life and say yes to opportunities that push you out of your comfort zone. I discovered so many passions in college for the first time simply because I said "yes" to opportunities as they presented themselves. And after making friends around the world, changing my major to something that truly fulfilled me during pre-medical studies, and devoting time working in a variety of areas prior to medical school (translation intern at a literary magazine, camp counselor, public health department intern, etc), I can say that my time in medical school had been more enjoyable. These experiences helped me learn more about myself prior to starting this challenging but worthwhile experience, and even in my largest moments of doubt and imposter syndrome, those people, places, and opportunities outside of medicine helped be an anchor for me during my current studies.

### What would you tell younger students who are exploring health careers?

No other careers are like health careers - you get to work at the intersection of applied science and empathetic humanities to improve the quality of life for those around you and for the communities you serve. Despite the long years of training, the lives you get to impact and the relationships you form with patients make it all worth it -- and your unique life experiences, even those that may seem insignificant at times, will always surprise you in how you can bond with patients over them. If you're interested in health careers, seek out mentors early - connect with the students, faculty, and professionals on the SCM social media pages, talk to local healthcare workers, and gain as much experience in the fields that interest you most! The opportunity to join these professions is one of the greatest privileges in this life.

