

[Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim – Dental School Personal Statement – Muhammed Ziauddin](#)

'Shri Ramajeyam!' chanted the village magician back in Bangladesh, as he tried to heal my grandmother's toothache for 40 Taka (equivalent to \$0.50 in the US). The cheap hocus pocus failed and ultimately, an oral screening at a local hospital diagnosed an oral lesion in her mouth. However, it remained untreated because of my family's limited finances.

These financial challenges that have continually haunted my family have helped ingrain the value of patience within the very essence of my personality. Our patience in reapplying for the Diversity Visa Lottery over and over finally paid off the 9th time, when we won. We thought our financial distress would improve, so we happily left for America. But, surprises ensued. Extreme poverty, accompanied by a sudden cut in Medicaid forced me to curtail my visits to the orthodontist, but I continued to wait, as I had always been, for a change in fortune.

That change came when my orthodontist halved my fee after sympathizing with my situation. This drew me to a dentist's prerogative to demonstrate compassion. The importance of a good patient-doctor relationship stood out even more when I shadowed Dr. Pinto, an oral surgeon. During his interaction with a medically compromised patient, who was suffering from a prior iatrogenic procedure, I saw how dentists not just treat the local symptoms of pain, but also address it in a systemic way. This interactive process reminded me of my time leading mentoring program as an International Youth Scholar, in which I mentored a Somali refugee named Abdi. Being psychologically vulnerable as a result of having faced a civil war, initially, he appeared reserved. With my consistent efforts, I built rapport with him as he slowly opened up about his struggle in the refugee camp, his love for soccer, and his dream to study in the U.S. With my encouragement, he applied and received a scholarship at Syracuse University. I will never forget his smile when he gave me the news. It reaffirmed the holistic nature of a dentist's influence on an individual's systemic as well as psychological health.

In addition to treating individuals, I want to expand the influence of dental awareness on a community-wide scale and I began this by targeting my local Philadelphia community. I co-founded the Community Dental

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Disease Prevention Society aiming to reduce the prevalence of dental diseases. We conducted workshops at low-income schools in the city. Despite the initial lack of interest among students, gradually the number of workshop participants grew as they could relate the workshops to their real life experiences. Here Tagita, a first grader shared her story of waiting for a dental appointment due to her family's financial incapacity, reiterating the inaccessibility of the dental care provision. Meanwhile, high school students expressed concerns about the increasing prevalence of dental malpractice. This made me extend our goals to educate dental providers of iatrogenic dentistry. Additionally, we also set about spreading scientifically based awareness in dispelling damaging propagandas such as those spread by the Fluoride Action Network about the harmful effects of water fluoridation.

Aside from my involvement with the community, I found personal gratification and further enhancement of my endurance while I was taking a sculpture course. After the caffeinated nights and clay-stained hands at the studio, looking at my first project – a clay bosom of Abraham Lincoln, an unprecedented sense of pride flooded through me. Right then, I knew that in order to be fulfilled I would need manual involvement in my future profession.

The unique opportunity offered by dentistry to integrate my manual dexterity with my love for science further drew me in. My passion for science grew in a crowded lab-hood at my organic synthesis lab, where I endured repeated tedious phases of optimization of the reaction conditions. Ultimately, I experienced a deep sense of satisfaction as I produced newer molecules in high yield culminating in a co-authorship of a paper in Organic Letters.

Perseverance gained throughout my life and from my involvement in science, arts and community activism makes dentistry a perfect match for me. Be it campaigning against iatrogenic dentistry via CDDPS, or making someone like Abdi smile confidently, dentistry has allowed me to consolidate my ideals. As I continue to advocate for increased accessibility to dental care for financially disadvantaged patients, I understand that progress will be slow; for now, I vow to stay focused, stay patient.

