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## Meet the Student Ambassadors

Student Ambassadors work with the Blue Ridge Partnership for Health Science Careers (BRPHSC) to promote and serve as outreach partners to fulfill the mission of the BRPHSC. They are leaders in voicing their health care career journeys, and elevating the student perspective in building a coalition model approach to improving local workforce development, training, outreach, and public health. The following pages highlight each ambassador and provide a glimpse of the paths that have led them to where they are right now. Please take the time to get to know these representatives and reach out to chat or invite them to an event!





# Emma Batty

Hometown: Roanoke, VA  
Patrick Henry High School  
Roanoke Valley Governor's School



Patrick Henry High School  
Roanoke, VA



Roanoke Valley Governor's School  
for Science and Technology

**Degree/training:** I am still a high school senior, but I have plans to pursue a degree in biochemistry and then attend medical school.

**Career Aspiration:** I would like to be an anesthesiologist.

**Why did you choose your career path?** I have wanted to be in the medical field for pretty much my entire life. Coming from a family where both of my parents are physical therapists, I grew up around the medical field. My career aspirations have changed many times since I originally decided that I wanted to be in the medical field, for example, going into my freshman year of high school wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon. What draws me to anesthesia specifically is love of chemistry as well as getting to work with patients.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** I have known about this career path ever since I was little because of my parents and other family members being involved with the health science field. Additionally being a student at RVGS has helped me do research in the field of medicine and start to help me progress to reach my goals of entering this career path.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** I would say that many students that want to go into a health career do not know much about how many different career paths there are in medicine and it is not only limited to nursing and becoming a physician. While that may be the passions of some and they are important careers, there are so many other health related careers that are also very important that might fit their interests better. I think that these students should be given all of the options so they know what they will be happiest and have the most passion doing.



**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** I have really always wanted to have a career in medicine whether it be on the research side of things or the clinical. Towards the end of middle school specifically was when I completely set my heart on becoming a physician. I would say the biggest thing that contributed to this decision was a field trip we had in school to the hospital where we got to hear about health careers and they took us through basic emergency medicine techniques like how to pack a wound and how to use a tourniquet as well as guided us through a small mock surgery. Between those hands on experiences and just simply being in the hospital I could see that this was something that I wanted to pursue as a career.

**If you completed an internship, tell us about it.** I am currently pursuing a mentorship through RVGS mentorship program with the Yan Lab at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute. Through this mentorship I will get to work with the lab and deepen my research experience. I am currently in the phase of attending lab meetings and shadowing lab members, but I will eventually start my own research project in the lab with the guidance of Dr. Yan and the other lab members.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** I feel like being at the Roanoke Valley Governor's School has helped me a lot as the classes are very rigorous and all of the teachers are very supportive. The specific classes that I have taken there that I would say helped me the most were biology and chemistry, as well as all of the research electives I have taken there (specifically microbiology and biotechnology). I would also say that my sports medicine class through the Roanoke Technical Education Center (ROTEC) that I took at Patrick Henry High School was also very helpful.

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?** I do wish that I would have had the chance to take some of the other health career specific classes through ROTEC at PHHS, but other than that I have been happy with my courses so far.





# Rachael Brown



Glenvar High School  
Roanoke, VA

Hometown: Roanoke, VA

Glenvar High School

Burton Center for Arts & Technology

**Degree/training:** EMT certification, Radiologic technologist

**Career Aspiration:** I would like to get my doctorate in Radiology one day.

**Why did you choose your career path?** I thought it sounded very interesting when I heard someone talking about it with my dad and at the time I had no idea what I wanted to do for a job. I always knew I wanted something in medicine but not what and that helped me to decide on this path.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** My dad's friend's wife is in Radiology and she was telling him about it. I heard them and thought it sounded interesting and asked for more details.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** To tell them to find a good balance between studying for your classes and having fun there's a lot of studying involved, but if you do it too much, you will make yourself miserable and not enjoy the program.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** Being in algebra and doing well in that program has helped a bunch in the Radiology class most of the math is algebra.

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?** Chemistry, because in Radiology you talk about the different chemicals a lot.





# Rihana Carson

Hometown: Roanoke, VA  
Northside High School  
Burton Center for Arts & Technology



Northside High School  
Roanoke, VA

**Degree/training:** I'm a certified EMT

**Career Aspiration:** I want to be a forensic pathologist

**Why did you choose your career path?** I've always had an interest in the body's functions when we pass away and I've always wanted to work with people who have a deep interest in medicine.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** I grew up watching police and detective shows so I always thought it was cool how crimes were solved just by one person examining a body. I entered into EMS to figure out if I would be comfortable touching and seeing people bleeding or even dying. If I wasn't fine with anything in EMS, I knew I wouldn't be able to be a pathologist.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** I would tell them to be patient and not expect people to have the same amount of progress at the same time. People work at different paces and some burn out quickly if pushed too hard.

**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** I did start thinking about pathology in middle school, but I was changing my dream career almost every year. I remember wanting to be a police officer all of elementary school, then a scientist (didn't really know what kind), a firefighter, and a writer. My aspirations have changed so much but not really, I've always wanted to be someone I can look at in the mirror and be filled with pride. Pathology just pulled me in, I don't know when exactly it happened but I can't think of another career I want to do at this very moment.



**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?**

I volunteered with the local fire stations during my clinicals for getting my EMT. Every station I was at, I was met with such acceptance that I started to question whether being a paramedic would suit me more. The firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics all taught me so much and opened my eyes to the other paths in healthcare and encouraged me to pursue what I wanted to do. EMS is like a giant family so I'm hoping for even just a little of that in pathology.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** My EMT teacher helped me. She taught me most of what I know in the medical field and was determined to help me pass my EMT after I failed my psychomotor testing the first time. With her I've come to realize that the healthcare field is about learning rather than getting angry when you fail a test or don't understand something, you have to ask or learn to grow as a person and a provider.

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?**

I wish I took more classes centered around understanding the heart, I've always been bad at figuring it out.





# Mikel Cawley

Hometown: Jackson, Michigan  
Virginia Tech



**Degree/training:** Northern Michigan University (Bachelor of Science in Biology), Northern Michigan University (Master of Science), and currently Virginia Tech (Ph.D. in Translational Biology, Medicine and Health)

**Career Aspiration:** I aspire to conduct research at an R1 university as a tenure-track faculty or as a Senior Investigator with the National Institute of Health focused on mitochondrial biology in brain diseases.

**Why did you choose your career path?** Continuing my education in the Translational Biology Medicine and Health program has provided extensive technical training in my field, the opportunity to build academic relationships and networks, training that fosters an inclusive environment for younger scientists in my community, and frequent opportunities for scientific collaborations, which are all fundamental to the future of scientific research.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** I first became aware of research in cellular and molecular biology as a senior undergraduate student. I began volunteering in a lab funded by the National Institute of Health, which led me to continue my education and focus my research goals towards translational biology and medicine.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** Make sure students know that success is not linear. You will frequently take steps back in your journey before moving forward, but this is still progress. Often, these moments provide the most valuable lessons and motivation to continue forward.



**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career.** In my junior year of undergrad, I was volunteering in a hospital and first began to question if I wanted to go to medical school. I felt scared to change my mind, but I started asking doctors and nurses about other career options in health and medicine. I received excellent advice from several mentors and quickly realized I should try volunteering in a research lab at my university. It is never too late to learn or try something new!

**What courses do you wish you had taken to prepare you for your current health career training?** I wish I had taken the time to learn and speak multiple languages.







# Rylee Chapman



CENTRA  
COLLEGE

Hometown: Lynchburg, VA  
Bedford Science & Technology Center  
Central Virginia Community College  
Centra College of Nursing

**Degree/training:** Certified nursing assistant, Certified clinical medical assistant

**Career Aspiration:** My end goal is to either have my RN-BSN, or be a nurse practitioner

**Why did you choose your career path?** I chose this career path because I enjoy the patient - nurse interaction, there is a trusted relationship that becomes developed through time. I enjoy being able to be there for someone through difficult times and how to guide them in the right direction. I also find the science on how the human body functions and disease processes very interesting and I'm always eager to learn more.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** When I was in middle school I traveled to Colorado to watch a family member graduate nursing school and it was so special! It pushed me to start applying to programs and doing research in joining the field.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** Showing students many options when it comes to schooling or careers, some careers require a lot of school, that might not be for all. What options that have a good career but not extensive schooling?

**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** Yes, this is when I decided I wanted to explore this career field. At the high school I attended, there was a technical school you could apply for your sophomore year and it was free, they took us on the bus daily.



**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** When I was enrolled in the CNA course and we had to do a certain amount of clinical hours

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** Biology

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?**

I wish I was enrolled into community college courses when I was a (high school) junior and senior, that way I could have also graduated with an associates degree.





# Gianna Hannum

Hometown: Smyrna, DE  
Roanoke College



**Degree/training:** Bachelor's in Public Health Studies with minors in Spanish & Sociology

**Career Aspiration:** Public Health Policy and Equity/Leadership

**Why did you choose your career path?** I chose this career path as public health encompasses every aspect of one's life and the importance of it. It is vital and critical to the overall well-being of societies. I realized that social determinants, like race, income, age, location, and more should not be the most critical thing to one's health, and that regardless of those characteristics, every person should have quality access to care.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?**

I did not hear about public health until I was applying to college. I came to Roanoke College with aspirations of being a nurse and healthcare administrator, and was unsure what public health was, but decided to major in it as a stepping stone to getting my MSN and MHA. It was not until my Introduction to Public Health class where I realized that my passion fell into the healthcare ecosystem as a whole and wanted to create policies that allow a more equitable, healthier society.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?**

I would tell them to be understanding, that being an adolescent and a student is not the same anymore- our needs are different and the requirements of success in academia and adulthood are different. We have mass access to media showing us the problems in our world thus making planning and looking toward our future is scary and seems unimportant. We need to create hope in our students and help create goals. We need to inspire our students. Most importantly, we need to listen, understand, and adapt to our student's needs.



**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** Yes, and no. I always knew I wanted to have a health career, but I was not aware of any degree that was non-clinical. In middle school, when they teach you about health careers, the only options they gave were: nurse, doctor, vet, or PA.

**If you completed an internship, tell us about it.** I have completed a few internships, but the most meaningful was the Virginia Department of Health Internship Academy. This was the inaugural year, so I found out about it through an alumni from Roanoke who worked at the department of health. There was an application that consisted of your resume and a letter of interest, and it was paid. I am still in contact with my mentors at VDH as I am presenting the work I did with them at a few different state conferences.

**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** The main volunteer experiences that led me to my decision were: volunteering at the nursing home in high school showed me that I wanted to go into healthcare. In college, I volunteer with the Bradley Free Clinic and assist in translating their health documents to Spanish for their Latinx population. This opened my eyes to inequities from language barriers. I now volunteer with Brandon Oaks Retirement Home where I get to create intergenerational events to promote socialization in both residents and college students. Each of these experiences gives me insights to different populations that will be affected by policies and shows the current inequities in healthcare resources.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** The dual-enrollment courses provided at my school, regardless of topic, helped me tremendously, especially when going to college. English dual-enrollment gave me writing skills and gave me insight on how to write like a college student. Anatomy dual-enrollment courses gave me study skills and assisted with test-taking.

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?** I wish there was a class in high school similar to one I had my freshman year of college called “Exploring Healthcare.” In this class, multiple speakers in numerous health-related careers came and spoke about their jobs and journeys. This broadened my knowledge of possible careers within health, and was able to learn more about the policy side.





# Katelyn Lucas

Hometown: Roanoke, VA  
William Byrd High School  
Burton Center for Arts & Technology



William Byrd High School  
Roanoke, VA

**Degree/training:** CPR certified and in training for EMT certification

**Career Aspiration:** I want to be a paramedic and have my full radiologic technician license.

**Why did you choose your career path?** I chose this career path because I have always enjoyed helping people, even when I was in pre-K. Over the years I have just recently found a huge passion for the medical field.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?**

I originally heard about AMT through my high school and I took the course to get me started into the medical field. Then through the middle of last year, I heard about the radiology class in EMT. I took quick action in applying for radiology because there was only a limited number of students that could only get in.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** You never know where the road might take you, so always be open to try something new. Because you might enjoy it better in the long run. (Everything happens for a reason.)

**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** Honestly no, ever since kindergarten I wanted to be a teacher, then my freshman year I wanted to be an athletic trainer. So I reached out to the athletic trainer to see I could shadow her, and she said yes. I have been shadowing her for almost four years now. I originally took the EMT class to get me more experience with the medical field. At first I thought I wasn't made out for EMT, but then it only took one clinical to make me realize that this is where I'm supposed to be. Then I had the opportunity to take a radiology just to see if I liked that, and I have enjoyed the class so far.



**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** I volunteered at different stations during my clinical hours for my class, and I currently am volunteering at Vinton First Aid Crew. During my time at the stations a lot of the members like to teach me new or past information.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** Courses at William Byrd and BCAT

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?**  
EMT and radiology





# Emilie Plowick

Hometown: Lynchburg, VA  
Centra College of Nursing



CENTRA  
COLLEGE

**Degree/training:** Certified medical biller

**Career Aspiration:** My goal is to eventually go back to school for my RN.

**Why did you choose your career path?** I love people and I always knew I wanted to be in a field where I would have a meaningful impact on my community. I have been interested in the medical field for as long as I can remember, but it wasn't until recently that I got the courage to go back to school and follow my passion.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** My grandmother was a nurse and hearing her tell stories about her job when I was a kid was the first time, I really paid attention to what it means to be a nurse.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?**

I think it's important to let people know that it's okay to take baby steps into a career in healthcare. I felt very discouraged about a career in nursing when I was first considering it a few years ago. I felt like I didn't have the GPA or experience to get into a program, but throughout my own journey, I've gained meaningful experiences, built a support system, and took the time I needed to prepare myself for nursing school.

**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** No, I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do as a career until I was 21. I had already gone to school, gotten my associate's and started my job as a medical biller when I finally realized nursing was what I wanted to do. It took me even longer to figure out how I could pursue nursing as a career.



**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** The only course in high school I took that may have helped me was biology.

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?** I wish I had taken more science courses in high school, specifically anatomy and physiology. I didn't have a solid science background prior to nursing school, and I spent a lot of time teaching and reteaching myself science content to prepare myself for the LPN program.







# Hannah Puskar

Hometown: Catawba, VA  
Virginia Western Community College

VIRGINIA  
WESTERN

**Degree/training:** Associate of Science, w/Biotechnology certification (Pre-med studies)

**Career Aspiration:** Research Physician in Oncology

**Why did you choose your career path?** Early on I knew I wanted to go into the healthcare field to bring healing to those who are sick. During high school and my first year of college I found my passion lies in cellular biology and biotechnology processes. I believe health is a complex multi-factor institution of the human body, however observing the smallest increment of life can lead to discoveries about large networks that contribute to health. I aspire to specialize in diseases that begin at the cellular level, namely oncology.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** Going to my pediatrician as a child was never an exciting experience, however these appointments, as well as my mother being a nurse, introduced me to the field of health at an early age. As I learned about the path to become a doctor, I was inspired and knew I would be a good fit because I loved science and wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself to help those who are sick. I am still in an early stage of my academic career, however I entered this path a long time ago when I dedicated myself to the challenge that becoming a doctor would be. I continue to follow this path when I learn more about the human system in class and the amount of which is unknown or still yet to be discovered inspires me further.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** I believe that there is not enough education on the expanse of health careers that are entwined with every discipline. Health science is not limited to nursing and doctoral degrees, but even business, statistics, chemistry, psychology, history, etc. There are so many aspects to health in modern society and those who want to work in the health sciences should know that!



**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** Yes! In second grade I knew I wanted to become a scientist, which later led to the idea of becoming a doctor even before middle school. I was not aware of the exact path that I would need to follow until later in high school, but I was told even then that I would be in school for a really long time and this never scared me because I loved school, especially the sciences.

**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** During high school, before Covid-19, I volunteered at Friendship Health, a hospice for the elderly. During my time there I worked with nurses to provide basic care for the patients and I loved every second of the patient-nurse relationship. I learned about HIPAA regulation and the importance of bedside manner. I also received a first hand account of the fast paced environment of a team of healthcare professionals. This experience pushed me further into pursuing medicine. Unfortunately, due to covid I have not experienced volunteering in a hospital, but that is my next goal to get more experience with the world of medicine.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** Health/Nutrition, Biology, Chemistry

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?** I wish I took EMT courses during my time in high school to allow me to receive more experience and training in medicine.





# Mallory Rothrock

Hometown: Greensboro, NC  
VCOM



Edward Via College of  
Osteopathic Medicine

**Degree/training:** UNC- Asheville (Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry with a Minor in Neuroscience), VCOM (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine)

**Career Aspiration:** I aspire to become a Family Medicine Physician in a rural/underserved community.

**Why did you choose your career path?** I specifically chose osteopathic medicine because of the philosophy of patient care; patient is a unit of mind, body, and spirit. I believe that this is a unique approach to patient care that not only attempts to address poor health but also recognizes and acknowledges social components to the overall disease state. For example, is my patient non-compliant with their medication or are they having trouble paying for it, does my patient have access to nutritious food, or safe housing, etc. My hope is that I can take my medical education and become a physician who not only treats disease but assists my patients on their overall journey of wellbeing. I hope to serve as an educator, advocate, and confidant in my role both as student doctor and future physician.

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** My biggest inspiration in choosing this career path was my own family physician growing up. He shaped my relationship with my own health and I recognized the impact that I too could have on peoples life through this career. I entered this career path by doing things I loved. Going into undergrad, I knew I loved chemistry and decided to pursue that as my degree. It was in this program I was presented with the opportunity to complete several research projects which ranged from physical chemistry to medically focused biochemistry. I shadowed physicians, completed an internship, and spent my gap year working as a front office representative at an underserved clinic. All of these things allowed me to find my niche of interest in medicine and truly have inspiration as to what would fuel my career interests.



**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** My advice would be to make sure students are aware that there are careers outside of nursing, advanced practice providers, and physicians in health care. There is such a wide variety of opportunities to make an impact in the medical field and it doesn't have to be in the "traditional" sense. Not every career is for everybody and that is okay, there are plenty of avenues to make a meaningful mark! Another piece of possibly more practical advice is to have resources available to students about average cost of education for each path. While I would never want this to be a deterrent to pursuing a career, looking back I wish I would have known the financial gravity of putting myself through medical school, taking the MCAT, applying for schools, etc. I feel like having a career coach or guidance counselor having this information, especially regarding MCAT and application costs, would have potentially impacted my strategy in applying to schools.

**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** Yes, I knew from a young age that I was interested in pursuing a career in medicine. Although, it wasn't until high school that I was able to start my academic journey toward a health career.

**If you completed an internship, tell us about it.** I completed an internship at MAHEC in Asheville, North Carolina between my junior and senior year of my undergraduate education. I was assigned to a physician who I shadowed throughout clinic and completed a community outreach project, assessing some of the social determinants of health. There was an application and interview process and I found out about this opportunity through my college. It was a paid internship and I no longer have contact with the organization.

**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** Mobile health clinic that went into different underserved areas of my local community and offered walk-in appointments, covid testing, and covid vaccine.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** Health Sciences I & II, Pharmacy Technician course, AP Chemistry





# Donovan Sherry

Hometown: Roanoke, VA

Hidden Valley High School

Burton Center for Arts & Technology



Hidden Valley High School  
Roanoke, VA

**Degree/training:** High-School, Technical school, Certified Nursing Assistant training.

**Career Aspiration:** In my current position, (high-school) my future is focused on maintaining a high GPA and lead productive extracurricular involvement in my undergraduate studies as a Pre-Medicine Student. Doing so will provide me an opportunity for a competitive medical school that will put me on track for residency.

**Why did you choose your career path?** It's actually a funny story how I chose this career path. I was in line at Kroger, and the clerk asked middle-school me what I wanted to be when I was older, and I told her I simply did not know. Although she was a clerk she told me about how rewarding the medical field is as well as financial and job security it provides. From this point on I have been volunteering at hospitals and have been doing clinicals as a CNA and I can confidently say this was the right choice!

**Where did you hear about a health career path and how did you enter this path?** Because I was introduced so young to the medical field I have been searching for reasoning as to 'why' I want to fulfill this career. This search for my reasoning led me to the technical school for my high school BCAT (Burton Center for Arts and Technology) where I enrolled in the nursing program. This may have been the best decision I have made in my nursing career; not only has it fueled my passion to pursue a career as a M.D., but it has also led me to opportunities that are lifting Roanoke such as the Blue Ridge Partnership for Health Science Careers.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** Get started early! Luckily, I had the opportunity at BCAT to be a part of the nursing program. Thus, throughout my journey simply as a CNA, I have been set on a path of personal growth and self discovery. However, if this is not a possibility, I would recommend counselors to look into seminars for health careers as well as 'career days' at your organization. If it weren't for the tours announced at my school for BCAT, I would have simply never

pursued a career in health as early as I did.

**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** Summer volunteering at Carilion was an excellent way to discover the critical function of healthcare. Luckily, I was on a unit handing out food and water as well as directing nurses when a call light for something like an IV bag emptying. This was an incredible experience as I volunteered 50+ hours throughout the summer and got to learn a lot about the career track I can more thoroughly see myself headed towards.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** BCAT! My teacher has a real passion for nursing and serves as an excellent role model. As a nurse for 17+ years I cant thank her enough for the Danville hospitality and true care aspect she has not only brought, but instilled within our class. (She is the reason I am here!) In general, it is extremely fascinating the way she has changed the mindsets of students who simply took the class just to try it out.

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?**

I am so early in my time in health careers that its hard to tell. Perhaps general counseling to help steer me in the correct direction would be best to plan out my future.





# Troy Stallard

Hometown: Roanoke, VA  
Radford University Carilion



**Degree/training:** I'm a first-generation senior dual majoring in the Biomedical Science and Emergency Services programs at Radford University Carilion. I'm a medically retired USAF Paramedic, educator, and leader.

**Career Aspiration:** My aspiration is to gain admittance in medical school with the aim of performing reconstructive plastic surgery for veterans and victims of traumatic accidents. "If I can externally heal the scars of trauma, the process of healing the invisible wounds can begin."

**Why did you choose your career path?** I've spent over a decade practicing Emergency Medicine on a variety of platforms, but it was medicine that chose me and not the other way around. The military needed me to be a medic and every step of increased certification has reinforced my love of medicine. Through my research and time spent healing wounded warriors with my background in mental health this is where I can make the most impact.

**What advice would you give those who are guiding students into health careers?** Being a first generation student there's a plethora of programs and resources provided to fund and accomplish your academic goals. I've learned this lesson one step at a time and advisement for these individuals is crucial. Every year champions of equity and inclusion break the barriers of the past and underserved populations receive better opportunities. We are the future and agents that effectuate these changes. Health sciences can be a deeply rewarding path of service that only passionate individuals will outlast. Start small and explore all your options, a good portion of my peers are not on their original career path.



**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** Volunteering is the first critical step in deciding what health science career you want to pursue. There are so many positions beyond being a doctor or nurse and every one of them matters to providing adequate care to a population. Shadowing, volunteering, internships are required for most graduate level programs and help to enrich the experience of your journey. Find what your passionate about and there's a good chance someone else is as well, develop your sense of service early and it will help to ensure your success in health sciences

**What courses do you wish you took to prepare you for current health career training?** Health sciences is a unique field that you can work while gaining higher licensure or certification while building experience. Start with a certification then work your way up to your final goal. Network, build relationships, and skills not relating to medicine are invaluable as it's a customer driven ecosystem.







# Orchid Tucker

Hometown: Covington, VA

Alleghany High School

Mountain Gateway Community College



Alleghany High School  
Covington, VA



Mountain Gateway  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**Degree/training:** I am currently taking dual-enrollment and Governor's School to earn my associates in the arts and sciences as I graduate high school. I plan on transferring my credits to a four-year college and majoring in biology or neuroscience, and I am also taking a class to earn my EMT certification.

**Career Aspiration:** I would like to go to medical school and become a pediatrician. I am also interested in working as a child psychologist or speech psychologist.

**Why did you choose your career path?** Growing up with siblings and working with my family as a unit has also made me realize home life can affect a person's both physical and mental health. The support system I have at home has provided me with a foundation for my career, and I want to give other kids and parents alike the resources necessary for them to feel confident in themselves and give back to their community. I firmly believe that instilling children with values, shapes their identity, and starts with having adults that build their self esteem.

**Did you start to think about this career path in middle school?** I originally started thinking about a career in medicine since elementary school. I had a pediatrician who inspired me and took good care of me when I had pneumonia. Around the same time after that, my little brother had been born and I was overjoyed to have a baby sibling to take care of. I realized that I wanted to work with children and take care of them as I had done for my siblings, and as my parents and doctor had done for me.



**If you completed an internship, tell us about it.** By next spring, I will be doing an unpaid internship at my local LewisGale hospital. I am currently volunteering, which requires an online orientation and in-person in addition to forms and vaccinations. I found out about volunteering through their website and contacted the volunteer director, while the internship will be done through school affiliation. Most of the applications that I have from my volunteer work should align with the ones at my future internship. With the EMT class I am completely, I will be doing clinicals to gain some more insight from a prehospital perspective.

**Describe any volunteer experiences that contributed to your decision to pursue training in a health career?** For the past year, I have been volunteering at Alleghany LewisGale hospital. Given the close-knit hospital setting, the volunteering supervisor has allowed time to go into different departments such as the ER, radiology department, and behavioral unit to experience hands-on work similar to an internship. Before my volunteer experiences, I was unfamiliar with the roles and relationships that staff members and patients carried. Being in various divisions has also allowed me to see how different each environment is, and how they rely on each other as a system—such as the ER transferring patients to the behavioral unit or ICU. I have also noted the variety of patients I have seen from each department, and I have been gradually learning to communicate and understand them.

**What high school courses do you feel helped you?** Our newly launched program, the Advanced Healthcare Program, has allowed me to explore the various types of healthcare careers there are and built a network of people I reach out to. The coordinator of the Advanced Healthcare Program, Mrs. Virginia Phillips has been a vital part of this journey in my high school career. In addition, my Dual-Enrollment English teacher and some of the STEM teachers I have had at both Governor's School and high school have been supportive of my career goals. My school permitted us to start doing Dual Enrollment/Governor School courses in my junior year, which is also when our Advanced Healthcare Program came out. The combination of the classes I took provided some more insight into the types I classes I will be taking for a typical "pre-med" major and prepared me for a college workload. These courses include classes such as English Composition, Philosophy, Calculus, Physics, and Chemistry.

