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Army Medical Students March to a Different Drum

No one salutes Remigio Flor or Nicholas Spinuzza when they walk the floors of George Washington University School of Medicine. Not their friends, classmates and certainly not their professors. During the school day, they are just med students, nothing more, nothing less.

Yet the two are also officers in the U.S. Army, attending medical school on fully-paid Army scholarships, allowing Flor and Spinuzza the luxury of focusing on learning their respective crafts without the heavy burden of hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loans.

Recipients of the Army's Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP), Flor and Spinuzza are following a long tradition of civilian-trained physicians joining the military ranks to serve their country. For both, joining the Army has been a dream that will lead them to new adventures in the future.

"I have always believed in the cause of freedom and the importance of contributing to its preservation and defense in any way that I can," explained Flor, who is a fourth-year medical student. "The Army allows me to expand my career to an even greater cause – service to my country and those who serve and have served."

Spinuzza has been interested in the Armed Services for as long as he can remember. Becoming a doctor and an officer "has been a really cool dream come true."

Yearly, the Army recruits medical and dental professionals to join their ranks, either in the regular Army or in the U.S. Army Reserves. The majority are students who take the HPSP scholarship to pay for tuition, fees and books at any accredited US medical or dental school. Once a student is accepted to medical or dental school, they can apply to join the Army and receive the full scholarship. Upon receipt of the scholarship, the student is



commissioned into the Army as a Second Lieutenant, receiving a monthly stipend as an Army officer.

“My father and uncle are both doctors, so I grew up surrounded by medicine,” Spinuzza said. “I chose to pursue an Army scholarship because I had always wanted to join the armed services, but I also wanted to be a doctor. The Army seemed like it was the right thing to do, especially when I realized I could have both.”

Flor said he was drawn to the Army not only for the financial benefits, but for the leadership and medical training opportunities as well.

In the heart of Washington, D.C., the two students are receiving a first class education from The George Washington University (GWU) in one of the most vibrant cities in the world. Deciding to attend GWU was about the training they would receive along with the leadership opportunities afforded to them. Flor explained that their program allows students to learn more than just medicine, such as the intricacies of emergency incident management, and global health, to name a few.

“Being interested in health policy, it made sense to go to a school that could provide the best opportunity develop as a leader and find ways to impact the future of health care,” Spinuzza said.

Deciding to join the Army and serve the country is not for everyone. Many of their peers will graduate from medical school and begin residencies at hospitals around the country, before embarking on a civilian medical career. Flor and Spinuzza will enter Army residency programs in their desired fields following medical school. Once they have completed their residencies, they will serve a minimum of four years in the Army as compensation for the medical school tuition.

However, unlike many of their peers, neither will have substantial debt when medical school is complete. “Even though my ‘debt’ is being in the Army for some time after residency, this is a sacrifice that I wanted to make, so it is actually not a debt at all,” Flor explained.

Flor is considering a surgical subspecialty or emergency medicine as his area of focus following medical school. Spinuzza is still considering his options before making a final decision.

Day-to-day, they take classes like their peers, no one really knowing their commitment to the Army unless they are asked. They take the same classes, study the same subjects and tackle the same tests. Yet as normal as their every day lives are, they do feel somewhat different from their peers.

“Today there is a lot of uncertainty with the direction of health care and the accumulation of student debt,” Spinuzza said. “I believe that not worrying about finances enables me to be more focused and motivated to obtain knowledge.”

Although their commitment is rarely shared by their peers and friends, both feel gratified by the reception they receive when they talk about their service. Some are surprised, but always, the focus has been on the commitment the two are giving to their country.

“I am often asked questions about what it’s like, how the program works and what’s in it for me in the future. This is something that I have wanted to do and those who know me are happy that I have the opportunity to pursue it,” Flor said.

For more information regarding the Army’s Health Professions Scholarship Program, visit www.goarmy.com/amedd/education/hpsp.html or call 1-888-710-Army.

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Photo credit: U.S. Army photo
Caption:

Army Health Professions Scholarship recipients can concentrate efforts on their studies, not long-term medical school bills.

