

RANDELL ALEXANDER, MD, PHD



ABOUT ME

You may have noticed that I didn't have a bio for last year. I was distracted by undergoing major cardiac surgery and being out of commission for several months as I recovered. As many essays have reflected on the experience of doctors becoming patients, I too found it to be a deeply educational journey. I had plenty of questions of course. What medications? (A few I didn't know.) Yet, I was surprised by how much of the experience mirrored my medical training from over 40 years ago.

The obligatory get you up to walk – great idea but after a couple steps the stamina wasn't there. A surprising amount of muscle wasting in a short time. On the bright side, it was a good way to lose weight, even though I've since regained most of it. Lots of little triumphs that sound goofy once you are better – just walking into a shower, walking out the front door once I decided enough was enough and I was going to do it, cardiac rehab (which was monitored gym exercise), and having a pacemaker that doesn't seem to trip off the metal detectors.

Fortunately, I'm now nearly fully recovered, one year later.

It all started in a small town in Michigan, where I was the oldest of four children. Once the parents trained me to do the chores like mowing the lawn, dishes, ironing, etc., it seemed like they had less enthusiasm to go through any ordeal with the others. For instance, my next youngest brother didn't have to mow the lawn. However, as much as I grumbled, I have to admit that he had to endure weekly allergy shots, which, in hindsight, sounded like a worse deal to me.

In college, I had a roommate my senior year who decided to go to medical school. Weird considering that when it was his turn to make meat loaf, he couldn't touch the meat. Saw him years later, and he apparently overcame his germ phobia and became a pediatric endocrinologist. The other roommates and I gave him a lot of grief about going into medicine. I went off to grad school in psychology thinking I would be a professor someday (never a doctor). But my interest in individuals increased, taking classes in visual perception alongside ophthalmology residents was illuminating, and I was thinking more about what to do post PhD. So, I was a teaching assistant to undergrads, but then followed some of my students to classes I needed for medical school. 100 level to 800 level classes at the same time. Major career shift.

So, medical school it was, and all but dissertation. We had our first child the day after my final exams for the first year-great timing! Our second child came along when I was a second-year resident. The OB got me out of the way by saying I should just check on the baby. I checked one thing, then another ok, I did both Apgars. Well played. Our first child is now a family practice doctor with three children in Iowa, and our second is a dermatologist in Milwaukee. Both always worked four-day weeks – smart move from the younger generation.

Finished my PhD 13 years after I started. The University of Michigan was understanding, given that I had gone to medical school and residency in between, but they still thought this was a pretty long time. I figured that with their long history, surely others had taken longer. But somehow, I managed to finish it.

The job has truly taken me around the world. I've been to every state, and all the continents except Antarctica. Excellent people wherever you go. Even had tea in the Saudi princess's home- twice.

Academics can have its benefits.