



SOMETHING WAS MISSING

"Although I loved music, I felt something was missing," says Pouya Joolharzadeh, recalling his undergraduate years at the University of California, Irvine, where he studied violin performance.

By the time he was a junior, he started thinking about a career in medicine. But he didn't act on that interest right away. It became a drumbeat inside his head, and after he started volunteering with an organization that paired musicians with ailing adults in hospitals and retirement homes, Joolharzadeh, now a fourth-year student at Pitt Med, couldn't ignore the sound anymore. "With music I provided emotional healing, but I couldn't provide that physical healing. I wanted to be able to diagnose and treat them and combine emotional and physical healing."

While enrolled at Scripps College in California for postbaccalaureate studies, Joolharzadeh learned about the linkage program—a nontraditional route to medical school that connects students to top research universities, such as the University of Pittsburgh, and accelerates the potentially three-year-long postbaccalaureate process.

"These are students who have graduated from an undergrad program, but did not receive a lot of the premedical, prerequisite coursework in order to come to med school," says Clayton Steup, assistant director of admissions at Pitt Med. "The program is designed for career changers."

Beth Gordon charted a different path with help from the program. After graduating from Duke University with a psychology degree, she worked for IBM, and then for a health care strategy company called Vynamic. Gordon, 27 and in her second year at Pitt Med, enjoyed these jobs, but felt they didn't give her the opportunity to affect lives. "I was helping strategize with providers about how to deliver care to patients, but I wasn't the person delivering the care," she says. "I wanted to be doing the on-the-ground, individual work at the bedside."

Eleven students matriculated at Pitt Med through the linkage program last year. Graduates from the Class of 2018 went on to competitive residency programs across the United States in internal medicine, ob/gyn, dermatology, pediatrics, and family medicine. ***—Story by Jon Kunitsky***
—Photography by Cami Mesa