Danielle Vasquez
Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholar Class of 2012
Studying human biology at Stanford University
Interned at University of California Los Angeles and the Veterans Affairs West Los Angeles Medical Center

Danielle’s decision to work as a physician in under-served minority communities stems from losing her grandmother to cancer as a child. Her mother’s mother was frightened of going to the doctor and, when her stomach cancer was diagnosed, it was already too late.

Danielle’s first volunteer experience was in the oncology department of a local hospital in high school. Many of the volunteers tried to avoid the cancer ward because of the emotionally draining atmosphere, but Danielle knew she was in the right place. Danielle later earned a full scholarship to Stanford University, where she continues to volunteer in clinics during the school year and serves as a Community Advocacy Fellow.

As an Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholar and with the Alliance’s support, Danielle interned at UCLA and the Veteran’s Affairs West Los Angeles Medical Center, alongside a cardiologist and a physicist. Together with her mentors, she explored cardiotoxicity—damage to the heart caused by radiation and chemotherapy—by analyzing data in search of a biomarker that signals the problem. She is also helped perform a meta-analysis of echocardiography strain (deformation) parameters for cardiotoxicity. For the early part of last summer, Danielle traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico and shadowed doctors there.

Throughout high school, Danielle was her surviving grandparents’ de facto physician, nurse and dietician. She taught her diabetic grandmother how to eat well, helped monitor her glucose and attended both her grandparents’ doctor’s appointments.

Juggling her studies, a demanding athletic schedule and the care of her grandparents made her self-reliant in a way many of her peers at college are not.

Before leaving for college, Danielle taught her grandmother how to prick her own finger to monitor her glucose and how to separate her grandfather’s pills. She still calls home to remind her father to book her grandparents’ doctors appointments.

Danielle credits sports, softball and soccer, especially, with giving her the confidence and the leadership skills that helped her achieve her goals.

After college, Danielle plans to pursue her M.D., specialize in internal medicine and work in an underserved Hispanic community. With support from The Alliance, Danielle is on track to achieving her oldest intentions.