



Muenzer

Overheard **Dancing through medical school**

Just a few years ago, **Maya Muenzer** (shown here) could be found, quite often, dangling from a trapeze as a teacher and performer with Frequent Flyers Aerial Dance in Boulder, Colorado.

Now she is a University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine graduate starting a residency in pediatrics at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Muenzer grew up in the Point Breeze section of Pittsburgh.

At Oberlin College, she double majored in biology and dance, both of which spoke to her fascination with how the human body works. She then moved to Boulder, where she spent three years with Frequent Flyers. They often collaborated with other local artists—breakdancers, choral groups, even the Boulder Philharmonic.

At Pitt Med, Muenzer received honors that included an Excellence in Pediatrics Award from the UPMC Department of Pediatrics and membership in the Arnold P. Gold Humanism Honor Society, Charles G. Watson Chapter. She also performed in this year's Scope and Scalpel production, "West Wing Story" (see page 8 for more on that).

As she moves on to residency, Muenzer expects to draw on her experiences with aerial dance in her work—even if she's traded her leggings for a white coat.

How did dance prepare you for medicine?

One of the reasons that I chose to come to Pitt Med was that I think that they valued the fact that I had this nontraditional background and saw even what I might not have been able to see myself: how I can apply those skills and the experiences that I had to myself as a physician.

When your hands are holding up someone's body, it's high stakes. It's very adrenaline filled, but you learn how to work under pressure. I was constantly having to work with people who have different expect-

tations, different understandings of their body, of what's going on in the air, different ways that they like to learn. That will really apply to when I'm a resident teaching a medical student, or an attending teaching a resident, or when I'm working with families and teaching about a new diagnosis, or trying to explain to a 7-year-old what's going on with their body and why they feel the way that they do.

How did your background shape your research?

My research advisor, Dr. Amy Houtrow, is a pediatric physiatrist. She primarily does research but also works with kids who have disabilities and complex health needs. And she's just fantastic. She's helped me with my longitudinal research project while at Pitt Med.

I was able to learn how to use the dataset that she uses, the National Survey of Children's Health. I ultimately wrote a manuscript looking into the physical activity participation of children with complex health care needs.

We know that physical activity is associated with lots of benefits, like improved health outcomes, greater quality of life, along with a plethora of other things. And so, my findings broadly show that this population is at greater risk for having lower physical activity participation. By focusing in on those children, we can make sure to not leave them behind.

What's next for you?

I'm really looking forward to residency where I'm going to continue to have constant opportunities to be teaching not only medical students and [premed student] shadows, but also patients and their families. It's a huge aspect of pediatrics. It also intersects with my passion for working with people with disabilities and advocating for them.

—Interview by Roberta Zeff