

Robert Pollock

Trading Notepad for Stethoscope



PHOTO BY KAREN KIRCHHOFF



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Robert Pollock has had an exceptional career in journalism. For nearly two decades, he served as an editorial writer, and later as an editorial board member and op-ed editor for the largest newspaper in the United States, the *Wall Street Journal*. He also received several prestigious awards for his writing, including being named as a finalist for the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.

Now, the 42-year-old journalist is making a career move that some might not expect. Pollock has enrolled in SKMC because he believes he's found something even closer to his heart than writing.

"I think practicing medicine is my true passion. Medicine has been a longstanding interest of mine and one of the things that I wrote about when I was a journalist. I figured now might be a good time to move on and try something new," he says.

Pollock's interest in access to medical care for sick and vulnerable populations began during his teenage years. As he grew older and witnessed several of his close friends struggle with cancer, he began speaking out about ways to make cancer medications more readily available to seriously ill patients and the need for more targeted tools to treat the disease.

In his Pulitzer Prize-nominated editorial series, Pollock critiqued the Food and Drug Administration's delay in its approval of new cancer drugs. Besides having the series lauded by one of the highest honoring bodies in journalism, Pollock said he was particularly moved by the number of cancer patient legacy groups that deemed his editorials as advocacy journalism and selected them to be honored.

"It was pretty exciting," Pollock recalls. "If the people that you think you're trying to help actually think you're helping, that means a lot."

He now wants to go beyond writing about the issue to effecting change in the field. While some may find the career change a bit odd, Pollock says journalism and medicine aren't as different as one might think.

"There are a lot of similarities between what journalists do and what doctors do. Doctors interview patients like a journalist would, and then based on the interview they have to compile a picture that tells what's wrong with the patient," Pollock explains. "The doctor, of course, is then charged with finding out how to best treat the patient, but the interview skills, the research skills and the way of thinking seem to translate very well from journalism to medicine."

Pollock expects to complete his MD in 2019. He's still uncertain about which specialty he'll choose but is leaning toward internal medicine or oncology. At least for now, he says, writing will be taking a back seat to medicine.

"In the future I imagine I might go back to writing both scholarly and in the press. My focus right now is just learning how to be a good doctor." 🐦

—QUEEN MUSE