

Jessica De Sabato


Studying at Jefferson, Feeling at Home



DE SABATO WEARING A T-SHIRT
DESIGNED BY A JEFFHOPE PATIENT
FOR A LOCAL PIZZA SHOP.

PHOTO
BY KAREN
KIRCHHOFF

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Jefferson University Hospital and shares Thomas Jefferson’s
birthday, April 13. “Being here feels like home.”**



Every Thursday evening, second-year SKMC student Jessica De Sabato and six fellow JeffHOPE volunteers operate a clinic at Our Brothers Place, a long-term men's shelter in North Philadelphia. De Sabato, who oversees triage, views visitors to the clinic as more than patients. They are her friends.

"I am the first person the guys see—I talk to all of them and love being able to provide continuous care," says De Sabato, who particularly looks forward to her chats with a resident known for his artwork. She and her peers follow weekly progress on his comic strip, and when he was invited to design a T-shirt for a local pizza shop that supports homeless Philadelphians, "several of us bought the shirts the day they became available and wore them to clinic. He was so excited."

The opportunity to touch members of the community in this way drew De Sabato to Jefferson: "Of the local schools, Jefferson does the most outreach, and that's one of my priorities." Growing up a few blocks from Methodist Hospital in South Philly also provided a pull; her family doctors were all Jefferson doctors.

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The only aspiring physician in her family, De Sabato earned a full ride to the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied biology and subsequently worked as a clinical research coordinator for the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, managing more than two dozen research projects at any given time.

"I enrolled patients, took their measurements, interviewed them, things like that," says De Sabato, who had

wanted to be a physician since childhood and had developed an early interest in orthopaedic surgery since her mom had undergone a series of spinal procedures. "Being in the clinic made me happy."

Because resources were tight in her low-income household, she applied to medical school under "disadvantaged status" and attends Jefferson with aid via three university scholarships; the rest of her expenses are covered by loans.

"I've never had a lot and have always appreciated help from anyone in any way," she says, noting that her limited means inspired her passion for volunteerism at a young age. As an undergraduate student, she was part of a group that visited public schools in West Philadelphia to teach kids about fitness and cardiovascular health. Between her science course load and community service, she found time to learn Russian so she could communicate with relatives of her husband, a Latvian immigrant she married during her junior year.

De Sabato can't really explain how she knew medicine was the right path, but halfway through her second year at SKMC, she remains certain that both the financial sacrifices and time commitment she has made are worthwhile. The classes, the lifestyle, her activities with JeffHOPE—she enjoys them all.

"But my favorite thing about Jefferson is my classmates," she says. "There are 260 of us, which might sound big, but I know almost everyone. Medical school is a bonding experience. We all help each other, and we all work together. I already know these are lifelong friends." 🗨️

—KAREN L. BROOKS