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# It’s Not Just a Career, it’s a Lifestyle

My name is Regina Baptiste and I am a second-year college student pursuing a career in Diagnostic Medical Sonography. Choosing a career is a very difficult decision that can seem nerve racking and daunting. What if I pick the wrong path? What if I am wasting my time? Many thoughts like these have passed through my mind in the process of picking a career path. I decided to become a diagnostic medical sonographer (DMS). I have wanted to be in the healthcare field since I was a child and my sister got diagnosed with childhood cancer. I want to be part of the teams that help diagnose and cure people of life-threatening conditions like the one she had. You have to be very comfortable with people and be able to build relationships of trust with patients. When I took The Clifton Strengths Assessment for Students, my top trait was a relator, which means I excel in developing relationships and I am able to make people realize how much I care about them. My other four strengths were arranger, meaning I am very organized, deliberative, meaning I anticipate obstacles and am a good decision maker, responsibility, meaning I take ownership of my actions and am committed to my values, and lastly consistency, which means I make a strong point to treat everyone equally and thrive under routine behavior (Clifton). I believe all of my traits make me the perfect candidate for my career choice because they confirm that I am responsible enough to work in the medical field and will be skilled at anticipating the next step. Being organized is very helpful in any career path as well and will only serve to enhance my other qualities. I also believe my last trait of consistency might be the most important; treating everyone with the same level of care is the only way to ensure the best results for everyone who walks through those hospital doors, which ultimately leads to the most lives saved.

Being a Diagnostic Medical Sonographers take ultrasounds of patients in hospitals or private imaging centers to help determine possible ailments, success of procedures, and results of certain treatments for physicians to observe. Sonography produces images of internal structures without using radiation to assess the internal structures without an invasive approach. This method is often used during pregnancy to view the developing fetus (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). The duties of a DMS require them to use specialized equipment to create images and conduct tests on patients to help physicians assess and diagnose medical issues (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). When considering my future occupation, I obviously also had to take my financial stability into account. For a DMS in the United States, only a certification is technically required, but I am pursuing a bachelor’s degree track. The information on the Bureau of Labor Statistics website only showed the statistics for an associate’s degree, so that is what I will be providing here. The median salary in 2018 for this profession was $72,510 a year with a job outlook of 17% increase, which is much higher than the average increase (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Most DMS employed in Houston have either an associate’s degree or a bachelor’s degree to stay competitive in the workforce. The Houston area holds one of the top highest employment areas for this occupation as well, employing over 1,500 individuals in this field in the Woodlands and Sugar Land areas alone. The average pay in these areas is also higher than the national average at $75,367 per year, according to the HCC Career Coach tool, and can earn up to $97,000 per year with further experience and qualifications (Diagnostic Medical). The requirements for the job are the same in Houston as in other areas, but the availability of work might be higher because Houston is such a large medical center with people coming from all across the country to be treated at facilities like MD Anderson Cancer Center (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The average salary that I would need to achieve to sustain the lifestyle I want according to my Texas Reality Check assessment is $71,145 a year (Texas Reality Check). According to the local statistics for the Houston areas presented in my research, I should be able to easily reach that necessity (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). I plan to live comfortably but not extravagantly. I do not need a lot of expensive things to be happy, but I do intend to save a lot of money for the future and travel whenever I can. Those were probably the two largest expenses in my reality check assessment, but they are the things I want to plan for the most. The job I am working toward getting pays slightly higher than the national average, but even at the national average of $72, 510 I would be able to live the way I am hoping to live. If I end up excelling quickly in my career and begin to make more money than the national or Houston average, I would use my money to invest in rental properties or improve the quality of my investments I already own so that I can begin to accrue residual income. I plan to also use my money to give back to my parents and family for helping me achieve my goals throughout my life. One extravagant thing I would buy would be a red ’69 Corvette for my dad because it has always been his dream car, and if I could afford it, I would buy one in a heartbeat for him.

Given my career choice, I will need to live in an area where there is a larger amount of people who need healthcare resources. This typically means bigger cities, like Houston. If I ever decided to move cities, I would first want to move to Seattle, Washington because it is my favorite city to visit. When researching this move on the CNN Money Calculator, I can see that I would need to make about $30,000 more per year to maintain the same lifestyle (Cost of Living). That was a bit of a hard pill to swallow. I saw that groceries were 46% more expensive than in Houston and housing was a whopping 85% more than in Houston. I also saw that the healthcare cost there is 36% more. According to the Career One Stop tool, the median salary in Seattle is $90,370. This rate increase would help my financial position, but I would still have to adjust my lifestyle to live comfortably. On the other side of the country, I could live in Orlando, Florida. I would like to live in Florida for just about the exact opposite reason for living in Seattle; it is sunny, close to the beach, and it has very similar weather to Houston. Florida has one of the largest medical centers in the country and a lot of geriatrics because of the large retirement community, so I would always have work. The median salary for my profession would be slightly lower, at about $68,000 per year but that is ok because the cost living for my comparable salary would be only $68,002 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). My lifestyle would be very similar to the one I would be leading in Houston, but I would spend more on groceries and less on housing, transportation, and healthcare.

When considering how I can develop my attributes to be better suited for the workforce, I think first of volunteering. I am already involved in one avenue that I believe will help me to develop the soft skills I will need for my job before developing the hands-on skills I will learn from schooling I found on volunteermatch.org. I currently volunteer at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in the Houston medical center. In my volunteering, I talk with patients and help them to decompress after their appointments or de-stress before them. Cancer treatment is a very stressful road to recovery that many people have to walk alone. Even for those who aren’t alone, it is one of the hardest tests life can throw at someone. I am learning how to communicate with these patients and provide them with an experience entirely independent of their treatment. I am there learning how to be a positive force in their lives and how to work with the staff in discrete and productive ways for the whole team to prosper. When researching further volunteer opportunities on Volunteer Match, I came across an opportunity to volunteer at a camp for children with childhood cancer called Camp One Step. This stuck out to me because, as I mentioned before, my sister was diagnosed with childhood cancer. We participated in a number of organizations like Camp One Step during her treatment. These programs gave us the opportunity to escape the hospitals, treatment rooms, and fear for a week or two. I would be assigned 3-4 kids to be a counselor for during the duration of the camp, and I would help them to feel like kids again along with the help of the whole team at the camp. I would gain skills with working with children through this opportunity which would help me in my career because I hope to specialize in working with children in the future. This would also give me the opportunity to work with a team of people working toward giving these children the time of their lives, and I would gain organizational and interpersonal skills in working toward making everything work for the best experience for the kids (Volunteer Match).

Through my research, I have been able to come to a clear view of my future plan. After being accepted and completing my career training, I will enter the workforce as a diagnostic medical sonographer specializing in childhood cardiac sonography. I will achieve this goal by first achieving the best grades I possibly can. I will also get as much volunteer and preparatory experience in my career field as possible to develop my soft skills in the next year before applying to have the best chance of being accepted to the school of my choice. I will also apply to a number of backup schools in case my first choice does not work out so that I won’t be stuck with nowhere to go. Once completing my technical schooling in five semesters, I will take the examination to become certified for the specialty I desire and ideally begin working in a children’s hospital after I graduate. If I do not receive a position at a children’s hospital, I will begin working at a general hospital first with my general certification and continue to apply to positions at children’s hospitals in Houston and possibly other cities across America. I know I am capable of achieving this goal because it is what I’m passionate about, and I have a steady plan for success. I plan to reach this goal within the next five years. Once I have completed this goal, I will continue to acquire further certifications to become the most qualified in my field I can be and get the most out of my career. I plan to be a self-sufficient, fully-functioning member of society working to make others’ lives better while also participating in the best life possible for myself.

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