



Education at URMC – Student Perspectives



Name: Alex Stella, M.D.

Hometown: Waynesboro, VA

Undergraduate Degree: B.S. in Biology from James Madison University

Graduate Degree: M.D. from the University of Virginia

Residency: Department of Emergency Medicine

Areas of Interest: Expedition & Wilderness Medicine: particularly expedition planning, austere environments, and long distance isolation such as subterranean, undersea, and outer-space. Also, Toxinology - the study of animal and plant envenomations.

Background Information

I was blessed to have the best parents and family, and grew up in Argentina, Virginia, and a way-too-short stint in Australia. I'm addicted to skiing and have traveled the world in search of isolated jaunts. I first began working as a ski patroller in the US and South America, then expanded to excursions in the Alps, Himalayas, and western North America. In between these adventures I spent time installing ski lifts, and went around western Africa looking for work in medical clinics – bushwhacking to isolated villages to administer polio vaccines to kids that had never met people from outside their village.

As a resident, I continue my drive for the outdoors. With the help of medical and graduate students I created and run the Wilderness Medicine Interest Group, doing lectures and outdoor excursions. This past summer I was in the Cordillera Blanca, Peru as the chief medical officer for a research expedition run by the American Alpine Club. I did all the pre-trip medical planning and care for all 16 climbers, plus the guides, porters and cooks while climbing glaciated peaks over 19,000ft.

Why did you choose The University of Rochester Medical Center?

The University of Rochester is one of Western NY's most recognized Institutions with national prominence for excellence in patient care, research, and education. This is what initially peaked my interest and then it was fostered by faculty members at UVa, who knew of the quality of education in the emergency department at the University of Rochester. When I interviewed, I immediately knew that I would be a happy resident here based on the warmth I encountered from the faculty and residents who interviewed me.

This is an exceptional program with a strong dedication to teaching and research. The atmosphere has a passion for excellence – where else can you simultaneously work alongside the President of ACEP, the head of EMS and a Beeson Grant awardee? As a resident, I feel like my ideas are welcomed and opportunities are provided to explore them. For example, my research on caving accidents and expedition medicine has been encouraged and fostered by the department.

And.... when you need to stretch your legs, having endless running, biking, rowing, skiing, ice climbing and hiking opportunities aren't too bad either.

Tell us about your program

We are a PGY1-3 program with 36 residents from throughout the United States. Our residents have amazing backgrounds and interest all melding together to provide incredible patient care teams. We have approximately 40 faculty members that all love to work with residents and support us in our personal and professional goals. The departmental mission truly encompasses excellent clinical care, education at all levels, and research of the highest order.

Our residency is unique amongst other programs in our commitment and bonds between the residents. This is promoted by the programs belief that our professional success is their goal.

Working in the Department of Emergency Medicine is a truly special experience. The diversity and volume of the patients that come through our doors is astounding – we are constantly challenged to care for our patients, learn the pathophysiology, while mastering departmental flow. Our work is a blend of energy, camaraderie, and humility.

Come over for some shadowing!

What are your career aspirations?

I plan to expand my training by pursuing a fellowship in Wilderness Medicine. This fellowship will allow me to become more adept at Expedition & Wilderness Medicine in far reaching places. In addition, I plan to undertake research to improve human performance in the most difficult locations.

What are some of the things you have learned since you came to Rochester?

Patient care in the Emergency Department is a never-ending balance between knowledge, chaos and interpersonal interactions. Even the most straightforward presentations have plenty to learn from.

Any advice for perspective students?

Identify the things that kindle that fire in your belly and pursue those passions. Accept failures as a reminder of why you need to keep pushing yourself. Along the way find good mentors who do nothing short of support your ideas and direct you to a good path. And if you need new inspiration, travel to places so distant if you went any farther you'd be closer.