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My name is Margaret Lippincott, and I participated in the Clinical Research Training Program (CRTP) during the 2005-2006 academic year. I am from Wellesley, Massachusetts and majored in biology and economics at Swarthmore College. I started medical school at Duke University School of Medicine in 2003.

I entered medical school with the intention of using the research year that Duke provides to do research at an outside institution. I learned about the CRTP at a presentation of 3rd year research opportunities. I chose the CRTP because of the focus on clinical research, the camaraderie amongst CRTP fellows, and the breadth of research opportunities available at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

My CRTP project was to design, write and conduct a clinical research study investigating the effects of short bouts of exercise on cardiovascular health with a specific focus on women. I worked with Dr. Richard Cannon, in the Cardiovascular Branch of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), who served as my CRTP mentor throughout the year. I wrote a protocol entitled "Effect of Regular Exercise on Vascular Function and Cardiovascular Risk in a Sedentary Work Force: The NHLBI Keep the Beat Program." The protocol was approved in October of 2005. During my research year, I recruited, consented, encouraged, and followed my study participants. I learned multiple clinical and basic science research techniques including 6-color flow cytometry and the colony forming unit cell assay for endothelial progenitor cell colonies. Our hypothesis is that men and women differ in the role of endothelial progenitor cells in cardiovascular health, and we are currently analyzing data from the study.

A typical day at the NIH involved recruiting subjects for my protocol, consenting subjects for my protocol, preparing subject blood samples for multiple biochemical assays, culture and flow cytometry, and running the flow sample on a 3-laser cytometer.

On days without subjects, I followed up on current subject participants, scheduled follow-up visits, analyzed data, and counted colonies by culture assay. I also had journal clubs, lab meetings, clinic, interesting scientific meetings at the NIH, and meetings with collaborating investigators throughout the week.

At the conclusion of the CRTP year, I'm returning to finish my 4th year of medical school at Duke University School of Medicine. I plan to do an internal medicine residency program and focus on women's health. CRTP was an invaluable experience that allowed me to create a research project in my areas of interest and have the ability to tap the amazing resources available at the NIH. I also connected with my CRTP colleagues through journal club meetings, potluck suppers and events in and around Washington, D.C.

If you are a medical or dental student and have ever thought about doing translational research and want to see why researchers are so passionate about what they study, I encourage you to consider the National Institutes of Health's CRTP – you'll see.