

In His Family's Footsteps

Jason Konzelmann was one of 73 students who received a white coat during SIU's White Coat Ceremony, the annual event where first-year students receive their white coats and formally enter the medical profession. By doing so, Jason follows in the footsteps of his great-grandfather, grandfather, his uncle, SIU alum Daniel Konzelmann, M.D., '92, and his father, Hank Konzelmann, M.D., '95.

Not only is Jason carrying on his family's legacy of medicine, but he has become the first child of an alumnus to attend the School of Medicine.

Jason was a teenager when his father attended SIU. Dr. Konzelmann, a family practitioner in Carlinville, Ill., earned his master's degree and spent six years working as a biologist for the Illinois EPA prior to going to medical school in 1991. At that time, SIU did not yet have an official ceremony for first-year students, but Dr. Konzelmann says the experience of getting his white coat was special nonetheless. "It's the physician's uniform," he says. "I was very proud to receive it."

Attending this year's White Coat Ceremony with his son, Dr. Konzelmann was impressed with the presentations. "It was a wonderful way to show the students that going to medical school is something

special," he says. "With medicine, your job really has purpose. You're making a difference, and you make an impact on people's lives, and there's nothing more satisfying than that."

In addition to his father, Jason's grandfather, Henry J. Konzelmann, M.D., recently retired after a 40-year career in pediatrics, and his great-grandfather also was a physician.

Despite his family's history, Dr. Konzelmann didn't pressure Jason to become a physician. "Actually, Dad discouraged me from pursuing the profession," says Jason, whose sister, Renee, is a registered nurse.

Says his dad, "I wanted Jason to be sure it's what he really wanted to do. He's worked very hard to get here. He's earned it."

Though Jason did consider other occupations, he remembers playing for hours as a youngster with his Fisher-Price™ stethoscope. "I want to make an impact on society, connect with people and help them maintain a good quality of life."

Like his father, Jason didn't rush into medical school. After graduating from the University of Illinois, he studied physiology for a post-graduate year, then spent another year in pharmaceutical sales, where he interacted with 125 different physicians. "I wanted to get my feet in the real world but keep it



Hank Konzelmann, M.D., ('95) left, and his son, Jason ('05), at the 2001 White Coat Ceremony.

medically related," he says. "My experiences have given me a more well-rounded picture of the whole field."

After gaining some "real world" experience, Jason felt ready to take the plunge into medical school. He carefully researched a number of medical schools, and he remembered his dad's days at SIU. "He was a student during the first years of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) curriculum, and he loved it," says Jason, who plans to pursue a career in primary care. "Everyone I talked to from SIU was extremely pleased with their experience." Jason even turned down other medical schools because "I was set on SIU and the PBL program and the SIU people. I knew I'd fit better here

than anywhere else."

And of course, his dad is thrilled that his son chose his alma mater. "As soon as he told me he was going into medicine, I told him, 'You're going to love it,'" says Dr. Konzelmann. "And SIU really helps their students succeed. It's a very friendly environment, and you have people on your side. If I had to, I'd do it all again."

After so much preparation before entering medical school, and with such a long family tradition behind him, the White Coat Ceremony was a grand finale to Jason's preparations.

"I felt apprehensive and also proud," he says of his feelings during the ceremony. "All my hard work paid off, and yet my work has just begun." ■