

## Sarah Hein's SWS Transcript

### **Stephanie:**

Hi, I'm Stephanie Hakulin. On today's episode of STEM Workforce Stories, we'll meet Sarah Hein, who talks about what drove her to study medicine...

### **Sarah [00.28]:**

...if you have a gut passion and you know that you really, really love something—so let's say that you really want to be an artist, and you feel it in your gut and you feel it in your heart, then that's something that you should go for. I've always felt that way about medicine...

### **Stephanie [00.47]:**

We'll learn how Sarah's love for Medicine led to her exciting career as a nurse practitioner. Welcome to STEM Workforce Stories...

### **Michael [01.11]:**

So I wanted to start by asking you if you can tell us a little bit about your background, how you grew up, and how you identify: deaf or hard of hearing.

### **Sarah [01.21]:**

Okay, so my name is Sarah. I'm hard of hearing. I grew up mainstream, so I went to a mainstream school all my life. When I was in high school, I went to a private prep in high school. Then I went to the University of Michigan, I had an undergraduate. I graduated with a

degree in Brain, Behavior, and Cognitive Science. And then I went on to Loyola University in Chicago, and I got my master's in neuroscience. Then I decided to try biomedical research for a year or two to see if I liked it.

When I was growing up, I really, really wanted to be a doctor, but along the way a lot of people told me I couldn't do it because I was deaf. It got to be in a way and I kind of took a different journey. So I tried the research route and I wasn't passionate about it, so I decided to go back to school to become a nurse, and went to Detroit Mercy. Then after about five years as a nurse, I became a nurse practitioner.

**Michael [02.43]:**

So how did you get interested in medicine? You said you wanted to be a doctor. What made you decide to want to become a doctor?

**Sarah [02.54]:**

So my mom remembers when I was about five years old, for Halloween I wanted to become bones, a skeleton for Halloween. So after that, she noticed that I had a really keen interest in the human body, and she bought me this book that's all about the human body. Ever since then I was just really interested in how the body works and why people got sick.

**Michael [03.23]:**

What was that like going to University of Michigan?

**Sarah [03.26]:**

I would say that the University of Michigan was a very unique experience. It's a very big school and it's easy to feel lost in that big school. But my advisor at the University of Michigan had a group of deaf and hard of hearing students, so I became part of a little group and we had meetings once a month. We went out to dinner, we hung out, we networked, we supported each other, and that's when I learned sign language, and I learned more about the deaf culture, and there were more people like me out there. So I think finding that support group within a big university is really important.

**Michael [04.11]:**

And what has maintained your interest? Because it takes a lot to go to undergrad, and then you went to grad school, and then you said you got into clinical research but you said it was not for you. How did you maintain continuing to study, continuing your commitment?

**Sarah [04.32]:**

I thought that I was going into medicine by going into research because I thought, "Oh I can contribute to the medical field by doing research to help the doctors so the patients would be better." So I tried that and it just wasn't my thing. I didn't feel it in my gut and I wasn't really passionate about it, so I decided to shadow some doctors and I shadowed some nurses, and I just remember the first couple times I shadowed I just felt awesome about it. I knew I was home and that's what I wanted to do. So I would say that if you're very passionate about something, and you know it's something that you want to do, just be patient because sometimes it takes a little longer to get where you want to go.

There's an organization called Association of Medical Professionals with Hearing Loss, or AMPHL. I found out about it probably a year before I was going to graduate college, and I went to a conference. There were so many deaf and hard of hearing people there, they were signing, they were talking, they were doctors, they were nurses, they were vet techs, they were PA, NP. I was just awestruck by this, and ever since then I've made connections with people from that organization, I've even been on the board of that organization.

I met two doctors at University of Michigan that are hard of hearing and deaf, and they mentored me. They're both in family medicine and they mentored me in this whole process, so that was really helpful as well. And I couldn't have done this without the support of my family. My family has been there every step of the way, even though my parents and my sister hear and they might not understand all the challenges that I face, they were there for me and they listen to my stories, they listen to me vent, they give me advice.

And then I still have a bunch of deaf and hard of hearing friends that are not in medicine and they've been very helpful as well. So I think what I'm trying to say is you have to find your tribe. If you find your tribe then you have all the support you need.

**Michael [07.04]:**

And I saw your badge, your RN badge, so could you tell us a little bit about your current job, what your duties are and what your average day looks like?

**Sarah [07.20]:**

So I have been a nurse for the past five years. I have had many different experiences because I am a float nurse right now. So a float nurse means that I can float to different departments, I don't have to stay in the same department all the time. So in the past three years as a float nurse, I have worked in the hospital on the general medicine floor, so oncology, cardiology and whatnot.

And I helped do a lot of vaccinations for the employees last fall, then I switched gears and I helped with the swabbing because employees have to make sure that they're not positive with COVID when they have to go to work, so I helped with that. I've been doing the vaccine since December. I was at a hospital when we did the first vaccine and it was really an emotional experience. So I was very happy about that. Now I'm doing the vaccines but I'm also doing other things in employee health, kind of like give other vaccines.

**Michael [08.28]:**

What has it been like working there during this time of the pandemic?

**Sarah [08.35]:**

I'm going to speak on behalf of myself and other deaf and hard of hearing medical professionals. It's been very hard for us because a lot of us rely on reading lips, and once you add the mask in the picture, that takes away our ability communicate. Not a lot of medical professionals that are deaf or hard of hearing have interpreters that work closely with them. Most of the time we just use lip reading or with a note-taker or something like that.

So it's been difficult but we're trying to persevere.

My coworkers, they all text me or they try to write stuff down to help me out because the masks are pretty difficult. But I have to say that most people are very understanding and they try to help me out when I can't understand what's going on. So then it's not to be discouraged but a lot of people just pull their masks down and say, "Hey, this is what I'm trying to tell you." So it's nice to see that people are trying to help me understand.

So sometimes we just have to figure out a different way to communicate. So sometimes we'll gesture, sometimes we'll write things down, sometimes I get a picture book that way they can point out things to tell me what they want, sometimes I have my medical assistant or nursing assistant come in with me and try to facilitate the communication, so if I don't understand them or they don't understand me then we can have a translation going on. So that's really helpful.

**Michael [10.20]:**

Well that's incredible. Just thank you, it sounds like you're a trailblazer there in your field, so thank you for that. So do you have any stories about something that happened in the emergency department that really stuck in your memory?

**Sarah [10.44]:**

Sure. I'll probably talk about my first experience with code blue, it was probably in my first six months of being a nurse. We had a code blue when the COVID started, and all the nurses decided I was going to be the scribe. So the scribe is the person that has to take the notes, so you

have to listen to everything that's happening in the room. You can have 20 different people in the room shouting out different things, and they wanted me to be the scribe. I was like, "Me? I can't hear." So I had to pass it on to someone else.

Usually in the code blue I'm the one that likes to grab supplies and I like to get the medications and I try to direct traffic, so I like to tell the doctor... Look, code blue is not what you see on TV. It comes in waves. So usually the nurses respond first to a code blue, so we'll go in the room and we'll start the code. Then we start getting all the doctors, the respiratory therapists, so we have all these people coming in waves. So what I like to do is, as these people come in I give them kind of a report so that they know what's happening and they can jump in, and they really appreciate that because you don't want to jump into a code and not know what's going on.

I'm also very big on advocating for myself so I make sure that my boss knows what I need, and let my coworkers know what I need. So I tell them, "You need to look at me, you need to let me read your lips, you need to wear the clear masks." So I made sure that people know. I do use interpreters when we have a big nursing meetings. So if we have big meetings at the hospital where there's a lot of people then I'll use the interpreter because sometimes those can be hard to follow. But when I'm just in day to day operations I make it work.

**Michael [13.02]:**

Do you have any advice for students who are in middle school or high school, who are deaf or hard of hearing, who are considering going into the medical field?

**Sarah [13.16]:**

So I would say that you shouldn't live with regret. Always trust your gut because I feel like your gut is leading the way. So my younger self wanted to be a doctor, and then I didn't end up doing that, and I didn't trust my gut and I didn't trust my passion. So I advise my younger self and younger kids that might be watching this to trust your gut and trust what your passion is, and to go after it, and don't let people get in your way.

If you have someone in your corner, that really helps you go a long way because you can feel that support, and you feel that love, and you feel that encouragement, and that will help push you to go where you want to go.

So for the young kids that want to get into the medical field, I'd advise that you keep your head down, make sure that you study it because the medical field obviously is very hard. I also recommend if you're having a hard time with classes, there's no shame in getting a tutor to help you, because if you're really passionate about getting into medicine, a little extra help can go a long way.

I also advise that you should get a doctor or a nurse in whatever field that you want to go into, ask for experiences like shadowing or interning because that will show you what it's really like. So I think shadowing is probably one of the most important things you can do because it kind of shows you what it is and then you can figure out if that's really what you want to do, because when you go into medicine it's a big commitment. The classes are very tough and you have to



study a lot, and you will be at school for a while. I know that sounds kind of bad but if you love it, it will go by fast, I promise.

**Stephanie [15.22]:**

Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. I really loved what Sarah said about tapping into your passion to succeed. Sarah's journey to a career in healthcare is just one of our many stories.

Check out more of them on [STEM Workforce Stories](#).