

# A NON-TRADITIONAL PATH TO THE FAMILY BUSINESS

By Lisa Crutchfield

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VCU University Marketing



In the end, the apple didn't fall far from the tree.

Kristen Ashby, M'16, is proud to follow in the footsteps of Kermit Ashby, M'80. Not only has she completed medical school with a scholarship from the U.S. Armed Forces, she's planning a career in radiology — the same as her father. Ashby is actually a third-generation physician; her grandfather, Samuel, was a general practitioner in Newport News, Virginia, for more than half a century.

But unlike her father and grandfather, Kristen Ashby's path to a medical career wasn't a straight shot.

"When you're growing up, a lot of people just assume you'll do something like your parents do," she notes. "But I was adamant that I wasn't going to go into medicine."

She majored in English at Virginia Tech, planning a career as a journalist. But an internship in the field convinced her that it wasn't for her. So she did a lot of soul searching and came to the inescapable conclusion: her calling was in medicine.

Her advisor told her she didn't have a chance. She hadn't taken a single science course as an undergrad. But Ashby buckled down and graduated early, then spent two years on VCU's Monroe Park Campus getting the prerequisites she needed and studying for the MCAT — hoping she could move across town to the MCV Campus. She aced it and was admitted to VCU's School of Medicine, her first choice. "The faculty at the School of Medicine has always been really supportive and encouraging from the day I expressed interest in medicine," she says. "I am extremely grateful for the career guidance I was given, especially as a non-traditional student."

After graduation, she's headed to her residency in diagnostic radiology at San Antonio Military Medical Center located at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. She's hoping to dive into some research there, particularly in mammography and the women's health aspects of radiology — an area that's especially crucial with the growing number of female veterans.

With a career in military medicine ahead of her, she's ready to connect with patients — a skill that she can't help but notice harkens back to her first love: communications.



**HIERARCHY** The management structure in the hospital is very similar to chain of command in the military, says the Class of 2016's Kristen Ashby. In medical school, you learn to work with residents, with interns and up the chain to attending staff. "Knowing how to operate as part of a team is something that is key in medical school, as a physician and as a soldier. I think VCU does a really good job of teaching about the interdisciplinary team and how everyone contributes to a common goal, the patient. These tools will be invaluable in my career as a military physician."

**STARS AND STRIPES** "Patriotism and a call to serve were the reasons I joined the Army and took the scholarship. I also like that I have the opportunity to do some non-conventional activities aside from medicine, and there are many opportunities to travel."

**A HELPING HAND** The Health Professions Scholarship Program offers full tuition and fees in exchange for matching years of service in the Armed Forces. Ashby chose the Army because of its training opportunities. Her father was in the Air Force (and her grandfather was in the Army, albeit without a scholarship).

**ON THE ROAD** As part of the HPSP, students must complete basic leadership training after the first year of medical school. Ashby spent four weeks deep in the heart of Texas, where she'll begin residency this summer. Though she did many of her clinical rotations at VCU Health and the VA Medical Center, Ashby also rotated at military hospitals in Texas, Washington, Hawaii and Washington, D.C.

**THE ENVELOPE PLEASE** Even though they know they'll do residency in a military training facility, HPSP students still are a part of a match process. The difference: Ashby found out in December — at home with her family — that she'd matched in San Antonio. She appreciates, though, that she got to attend VCU's Match Day and get an envelope. "I'm glad I got to attend the Match Day festivities to support my friends."

**SERVING OUR SERVICEMEN (AND WOMEN)** Like many medical students, Ashby did some of her clinical rotations at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond. She enjoys working with older veterans as well as younger patients who've recently returned from service. "The patients are really appreciative, and many providers love the freedom to focus on patient care and opportunities for research."