Before enrolling in Mayo Medical School, Jessica Saw dreamed of opening a pizzeria. Even well into her medical training, she still wanted to do it. “A lot of things about medical school were a struggle,” says the Olympia, Washington, native. “And I never got to experience this other career I wanted.” So she took a leave of absence midway through her third year to explore this avenue.

Some friends, who knew of her interest in food, connected Saw with the people who were starting up Forager Brewing Company in Rochester. So in 2015, while also doing research in the microbiome lab at Mayo, she went to work for the brewery and restaurant, which focuses on using fresh, locally grown and “foraged” ingredients.

When Saw got involved, the group was rehabbing a building that once housed a food cooperative. “I got to do some of the construction—put up siding, tiling—things I didn’t know how to do,” she says. Once construction was finished, she moved into the kitchen. Although she had made and served meals in a coop as an undergraduate, she had no formal restaurant experience. “I was cooking, I was doing the dream. I finally got to be in a professional kitchen,” she says.

She took away insights from her year in the restaurant business that she plans to apply as she pursues her interest in bariatric surgery.

1. **Communicate.** “A restaurant is a fast-paced environment,” she says. “You’re trying to coordinate between servers and the kitchen … trying to get entrees out at the same time. There were times when staff didn’t communicate because someone was in a bad mood, and it would be a horrible day.”

2. **Be smart about your movements.** “In the OR, we’re always tiptoeing around each other saying things like, ‘Excuse me, I have a scalpel behind you,’” she says. “In the kitchen, it’s much quicker and more direct. When someone says ‘Knife behind,’ everyone knows not to step back. With every movement you have to save as much time as you can, just like in surgery.”

3. **Understand the pecking order, but honor new ideas.** “It’s a hierarchical system in the kitchen, just like in medicine. The chef at Forager developed the menu, but he let us give opinions and was wonderful about being open to how things could be better. He let me as a student and first-time chef take risks and try some new things,” she says.

4. **Appreciate your team.** Just like in the OR, everyone in a restaurant has a role to play. “When you finish a shift, you feel like you’ve finished with a long surgical procedure. There’s a feeling of community among the group. Everyone is appreciative of each other.”

Saw, who returned to Mayo last spring to finish her third year of medical school, still gets back to Forager but as a customer rather than a worker. This fall, she’ll begin working toward a doctorate in physiology at the University of Illinois before returning to Rochester for her final year of medical school. Saw says she eventually wants to be involved in something that helps change the way people eat. “Food and eating are an important part of medicine that’s often forgotten,” she says.—**Kim Kiser**

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**Kitchen staff wisdom**

Mayo medical student Jessica Saw in the kitchen at Forager in Rochester.