

Ishani Desai's Path to Medical School Started with Volunteering

She's back at Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center as a Student

ROME, Ga., April 29, 2025 – When Ishani Desai first volunteered at Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center, she could not have known the village of supporters and encouragers she was joining.

When schools and colleges moved to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rome native and Georgia Tech graduate discovered that Atrium Health Floyd was one of the few hospital programs that continued to use volunteers.

Desai started by escorting patients and family members to and from the surgery suites on Floyd Medical Center's second floor. While serving there, she had a chance encounter with Floyd chaplain Greg Cater. Greg needed someone to witness the signing of an Advance Directive. This important medical document helps patients by thoughtfully walking through a series of decisions regarding the kind of care they would like to receive should they become incapacitated and unable to answer questions about their care.

Floyd's Pastoral Services team recognized her intelligence and sensitivity. Working with Carolyn Falcitelli, director of volunteer services, they asked if she'd like to learn more about Advance Directives and help execute them for patients in the hospital.

Desai didn't exactly jump at the chance. The work was rewarding, but it is emotionally taxing. Did she want a volunteer role that added that kind of stress to her life?

Chaplains understand the deep level of personal connection and the emotional toll of leading Advance Directive conversations. To help her find balance, Jason Jordan, Greg Cater and Chris Barbieri offered her the opportunity to round on hospital floors, handing out candy to nurses and other clinical teammates as a way to encourage them to take a pause in their hectic, challenging work.

Desai agreed to give it try.

A pre-med major at the time, she said "I was trying to find my footing and whether I wanted to practice medicine or not."

Her experiences with Advance Directives and rounding helped her mature. She learned important lessons about empathy, gaining trust and navigating difficult conversations. It was then that she had her "a-ha moment."

"This experience is the very reason I solidified medicine as a career choice," she said. "I was always interested in chemistry, and I loved that whole world. I had thought, 'Maybe I'll get a PhD. Maybe I'll go to grad school or med school.'"

Being with people at a critical time of life is gratifying, she said. It requires a leap of faith for both the patient and the person walking them through the process.

Desai volunteered at Floyd for three years, stopping only because she started medical school in Augusta.

This year, she returned to Floyd, not as a volunteer, but as a third-year medical student. She's performing her core clinical rotations in northwest Georgia under the direction of Harbin Clinic surgeon Dr. Paul Brock. She expects to complete medical school in 2027.

In her practice, Ishani knows she wants to have direct patient interaction, and she knows she wants to specialize in a critical care field.

How is she so certain of that path? It stems from her volunteer work, a message especially important in April, which is National Volunteer Month. Ishani found her volunteer experience so gratifying that it helped her to make this monumentally important career decision.

“It is such an amazing part of human connection. I know then that whatever specialty I choose, I want to be in the hospital with people when they are scared for their lives. That brings a whole other level of caring and compassion.”

About Atrium Health Floyd

The [Atrium Health Floyd](#) family of health care services is a leading medical provider and economic force in northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. Atrium Health Floyd is part of Charlotte, North Carolina-based [Advocate Health](#), the third-largest nonprofit health system in the United States, created from the combination of [Atrium Health](#) and Advocate Aurora Health. Atrium Health Floyd strategically combined with Harbin Clinic in 2024 and employs more than 5,200 teammates who provide care in over 40 medical specialties at four facilities: Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center – a 361-bed full-service, acute care hospital and regional referral center in Rome, Georgia; Atrium Health Floyd Polk Medical Center in Cedartown, Georgia; and Atrium Health Floyd Cherokee Medical Center in Centre, Alabama; and Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center Behavioral Health, also in Rome. Together, Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic provide primary care, specialty care and urgent care throughout northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. Atrium Health Floyd also operates a stand-alone emergency department in Chattooga County, the first such facility to be built from the ground-up in Georgia.

About Advocate Health

[Advocate Health](#) is the third-largest nonprofit, integrated health system in the United States, created from the combination of Advocate Aurora Health and Atrium Health. Providing care under the names [Advocate Health Care](#) in Illinois; [Atrium Health](#) in the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama; and [Aurora Health Care](#) in Wisconsin, Advocate Health is a national leader in clinical innovation, health outcomes, consumer experience and value-based care. Headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, Advocate Health services nearly 6 million patients and is engaged in hundreds of clinical trials and research studies, with [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) serving as the academic core of the enterprise. Advocate Health is nationally recognized for its expertise in heart and vascular, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, as well as organ transplants, burn treatments and specialized musculoskeletal programs. Advocate Health employs more than 160,000 teammates across 69 hospitals and over 1,000 care locations and offers one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs with over 2,000 residents and fellows across more than 200 programs. Committed to redefining care for all, Advocate Health provides more than \$6 billion in annual community benefits.

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