

## Student Profile: Denise Cooper, '17, Biology

### Observing Surgeries Helps Student on Road to Medical School

Morristown, N.J. (February 27, 2017) – **Denise Cooper, '17, biology, uses her memories of growing up in Monrovia, Liberia, to motivate her to follow her dream of becoming a surgeon.**

**At six years old during the civil war, while she was fleeing an attack near her home by a rebel army, she came across a young boy with his father who had his bleeding arm wrapped up in a white shirt. Cooper walked with her family and the man to a community clinic, which was closed upon their arrival. She crossed a bridge near the clinic to another town, while the man and his son stayed behind. She kept looking back but eventually lost sight of them.**

**"Till this day, I don't know what happened to them," she said. "I think that started my desire to help people."**

**Since last summer, Cooper, who resides in Newark, has been shadowing the vascular surgeon Dr. Tarek Alshafie at The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood. Cooper wanted to watch different types of surgery to determine what type she'd like to specialize in. The body part that most fascinates her is the abdomen, and vascular surgeons work with it.**

**A friend at Cooper's church, who worked with Dr. Alshafie for six years as an oncology nurse, suggested that she shadow him. Cooper observes Dr. Alshafie only when he's scheduled for surgery. On a typical day, she puts on medical scrubs and stands close to him as he explains the procedure, leaving room for her to ask questions. Cooper said that Dr. Alshafie is a great surgeon to shadow because he's very specific with his explanations and takes his time in surgery.**

**Cooper previously completed 45 observation hours at Morristown Memorial Hospital in the emergency room. However, she wanted to try something new. "In surgery, you're not just passing pills to patients, you're using your hands to fix the problem and to prevent it from happening again," she said. "It's amazing how surgeons can fix something that God created."**

**Cooper discovered CSE during a college fair in her high school, and she was drawn to its location, majors, and size.**

**The CSE environment as a whole is peaceful," she says. "I get to study in a quiet and focused environment while working at my own pace."**

**Cooper originally wanted to study in the pre-medical track but chose biology because it made applying to medical school feasible and doable.**



**Cooper would like to open up a hospital or clinic in Liberia. After graduation, she plans to continue to shadow Dr. Alshafie while studying for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) to apply to medical school.**