

Charles Louis Hartford

My interest in plastic surgery was first stimulated by the stories my father told and the drawers of slides of strange looking tissues and unexplainable defects he showed me in my early childhood. In my teens I encountered many disfigured children in East Africa and realized the incredible feats that can be accomplished by plastic surgery. The prospect of relieving the misery caused by cleft palates, shortened limbs, broken mandibles, and severe burns has continued to inspire me to become an plastic surgeon.

One of the main reasons surgery interests me is the surgeons' ability to define problems quickly and use intellectual and physical expertise to correct these problems. The ability to make significant improvements in people's lives by directly visualizing, feeling, and correcting problems in form and function has motivated me to work hard to become a plastic surgeon. I am attracted to the challenge of achieving the high level of intellectual knowledge, learning the problem solving skills, mastering the ever- changing technology, and perfecting the manual dexterity required of outstanding plastic surgeons.

I believe I will excel in the field of plastic surgery for many reasons. I have always believed that persistence and hard work are tools people use to push themselves to new levels. I have used these principles to earn outstanding grades in all my clinical clerkships, to be inducted into AOA as a junior, and to score in the 99th percentile in national boards. These principles also allowed me to climb Mt. Kenya, become a proficient rugged mountain skier, and earn awards for my carved animal sculptures.

Another reason I believe I will excel is my detail orientation which motivates me to unravel puzzles which lay beneath the surface. My six years of research in signal pathways, growth receptors, and cytoskeletal changes resulted in published papers and presentations of abstracts in a highly detail oriented field. As these pathways cannot be visualized, my research required the highly detailed conceptualization and focus.

My leadership skills and my desire to motivate and lead by calm persuasion have served me well on the wards and in the classroom, allowing me to form strong friendships with peers and house staff. My calm demeanor allows me to quickly gain the confidence of patients and families.

After a surgical residency incorporating extensive clinical practice and research opportunities, I plan to remain in an academic environment. I am interested in a career that allows me to have a clinical practice, to teach medical students and residents, and do research either craniofacial defects or flap reconstructions. I have always been intrigued by the craniofacial syndromes and their embryological basis, but also marvel at the reconstruction that can be done with various flaps, both autologous and exogenous.

With experience and knowledge, I hope to return to East Africa and other developing countries where the incidence of palate defects, burns, and other plastic surgery problems are prevalent, and the need for surgeons high. Providing surgical treatment for people who might not have access to treatment is one of my highest goals.