Alcha Strane isn’t one to back down from a challenge. If she was, she wouldn’t have gotten through college on a basketball scholarship — at just 5’4”.

“I was always the shortest one on my team,” Strane said. “But in my family, we had to finance our own way through college, so I decided early on I was going to get a basketball scholarship.”

Strane is from Hayward, California, in the San Francisco Bay area. The youngest of five, she grew up playing sports with her four older brothers. In college, she competed on the basketball court while following a pre-med track, graduating from the University of San Diego with a psychology degree.

She ended up at Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM), where she was inspired by the school’s commitment to social responsibility. “From the beginning, we were expected to be agents of positive social change,” she said. “We learned to work with vulnerable populations who were medically underserved and didn’t have access to things like healthy food and reliable transportation.”

At MSM, Strane helped to create a community needs assessment for a local health center. “My research partner and I went out to train stations, barber shops, grocery stores and everywhere else to ask people what they needed to improve their health,” she said. “Their feedback helped us advise the health center about changes they could make to better address the needs of local residents.”

Strane’s community assessment grew into a larger service project, the Cancer Health Advisory for Growth and Empowerment (CHANGE). “It’s actually an app we developed that provides health education for people who don’t have easy access to health information they can understand and trust,” she explained.

While at MSM, Strane received a scholarship from National Medical Fellowships funded by United Health Foundation’s Diverse Scholars Initiative. When she attended the Diverse Scholars Initiative Forum, she was able to learn about some the latest developments in health care research.

“I got to meet so many different scholars and hear so many different perspectives,” Strane said. “We got to see really cool, innovative approaches to using big data, which was exciting to me as a researcher.”

After graduating from MSM, Strane will begin her obstetrics and gynecology residency at Wellstar Kennestone Hospital in Marietta, GA. As a resident, she plans to use the cultural competence skills she learned from her work at MSM.

“As providers, we need to remember to ask our patients questions and listen to them carefully and respectfully,” she said. “So much of a person’s health is related to their culture, and if we are aware of different perspectives, we can do a much better job of providing the care they need.”