

Determined to Make a Difference

Anand Parekh finds satisfaction in public service

Anand Parekh (M.D. 2002) likes to look at the big picture, whether treating a patient at the clinic where he volunteers, advising the Secretary of Health and Human Services on a public health policy issue, or mentoring medical students at Johns Hopkins, where he's an adjunct faculty member.

The son of a family practitioner and a hospital administrator, Parekh grew up in West Bloomfield, Michigan, and, at 31, already has a formidable resume. After graduation from Detroit Country Day High School, he was accepted into the University of Michigan's now-defunct Inteflex program, which guaranteed exceptional students a place in the U-M Medical School before they began their undergraduate studies.

Finding himself with an "extra year" after finishing his bachelor's degree in political science in three years and with highest distinction, he spent it completing most of the work for a master's degree from the U-M School of Public Health, which he finished — presumably in his spare time — while he was in medical school.

After his residency in internal medicine at Johns Hopkins, he joined the Office of Public Health and Science, a unit of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as its senior medical adviser. Last August, he was appointed acting deputy assistant secretary of health and "operationally in charge," as government-speak has it, of the OPHS.

"There are lots of things I could do right now that are more lucrative or involve less bureaucracy," he says, "but this is satisfying to me, to be a public servant." It suits him because it engages all his expertises, because he is, he says, "a

problem-solver," and because it provides about as big a picture as there is in his field.

"Where I'm trying to go and where I've always tried to go is governed by how I can make a difference in people's lives," says Parekh. "When I see patients on Saturday mornings, the focus is that patient and how I can make a positive difference in this person's life. When I do policy work Monday to Friday, it's not better or worse, it's just different. Instead of seeing patients one-on-one and making that difference, it's really taking a step back and looking at the broad population and seeing how with good science you can improve the health of an entire population."

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He has no idea how long his current gig will last. The previous assistant secretary, John Agwunobi, left to help Wal-Mart set up small clinics in its stores, and it's unclear whether the President will submit a nominee to succeed him for Senate approval or fill the vacancy with an acting assistant to serve the remainder of the President's term. It doesn't make much difference to Parekh.

"I am a career appointee, not a political appointee," he says. "Where I am right now — not in many ways, but in all ways — really allows me to do what I've always wanted, which is to try to make a difference on a broader level. My men-



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tor here, William Raub, is the secretary's science adviser. He's been here [at HHS] for 35 years and had such a fulfilling career. I could see myself being here a long time, as long as I feel I'm able to make a difference."

Parekh does his own share of mentoring, including serving as co-chair of alumni events for the week that Presidential Scholars — an elite group of about 140 high school seniors, one of whom he once was — spend in Washington.

"I want to make sure they understand that even though it's great that they're getting this award, there are thousands of other students who could have received it," he says. "Much has been given to them, and they should remember to give back."

—Jeff Mortimer