Medical school comes with unique pressures. As a medical student, having a partner who understands those burdens can help you navigate them. Yet for some medical students, adding the demands of a relationship to the mix is not in the cards.

AMA member Avani Patel is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson. She entered medical school at 22 and felt as though she was in the minority as a student who wasn’t married or in a serious relationship. She offered some insight on the benefits of being a single medical student.

You have plenty of time

In the U.S., the average age at which women get married is 27. Men, on average, get married at 29. All that considered, it stands to reason that many medical students are either married or on the track to marriage during their training. Yet many are not.

“Different people are looking for certain relationships at different times,” Patel said. “In the South, it seems like people are looking for serious relationships pretty young.

“I think the biggest thing that I want students to know is a lot of us are single. When the time is right for a relationship, if you want that to happen, it will happen. I’m not going to force it. There’s so much that we already have in front of us.”

You can focus on yourself
The average age students enter medical school, according to U.S. News & World Report, is 24. You’re hardly a finished product at that juncture in your life. Patel has found that being single offers her opportunities for self-improvement.

“I embrace the opportunities I have,” said Patel. “I don’t have to worry about somebody else’s time. Med school has allowed me to grow so much. It’s a journey of self-growth and self-love that I like to have gone on before I offer that to someone else. It’s important to me—getting more comfortable with who I am.”

**You can pursue outside interests**

Medical school requires much of Patel’s time, but she has found that not having a partner has allowed her some bandwidth to pursue her interests in medicine that go beyond her formal training. Mainly, she has been able to do more advocacy through organizations such as the AMA.

“It’s really difficult to not spread yourself thin,” she said. “Because I’m single, I’ve been able to be more involved in advocacy work. But I understand if I was in a relationship, I wouldn’t have time to do all those things. The con is that you may not be able to give that person the time or attention you deserve. It takes away from valued experiences.”

**You have more time for your loved ones**

Patel lives with her family. In a phase of her life at which free time isn’t plentiful, she is able to enjoy quality time with them and rely on them for support.

“In terms of being single, you get a chance to value your independence, and you also get quality time with your friends and family,” she said. “You might not have much of that once you begin your career. If you have this opportunity, you can dedicate your time to what you care about. You don’t have to worry about thinking about how somebody else will feel.”