
How to make the best use of your pre-intern period

Sachithra Somarathna

AL 1998 Batch of Student, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

A pre-intern period is inevitable to all medical graduates of Sri Lanka at present. Currently this approximates one year despite of the overlapping of several batches of interns. This situation greatly contrasts with most of our counterparts elsewhere in the world, where such a period is non-existent. This delay in internship appointments bears several consequences to our graduates.

One noteworthy consequence is that the freshly passed out graduate (who is primed following the rigorous clinical exposure of the final year) is at risk of losing the clinical touch during the course of the pre-intern year. Deferring of post graduate education is another setback of the delay, because internship as well as post internship experience is a prerequisite for all post graduate exams.

Furthermore, a majority of pre-interns are involved in locum practice without the experience of managing patients on their own in wards. In addition to committing a misdeed and putting the unsuspecting public at risk, this encourages slipshod methods of patient diagnosis and management amongst young doctors.

Hence a well planned and well spent pre-intern period is an utmost need to make the most out of an otherwise grim situation.

The pre-intern may use his/her time to develop himself/herself both professionally and personally. Getting involved in research is one good option either on your own or under the patronage of a senior doctor. The knowledge, skills and attitudes you gather through this exercise will lay a foundation to a life long process of practicing evidence based medicine. Moreover, the publications of these studies will be assets at vivas and interviews both at local and international level.

The pre-intern period can also become a time to obtain experience in a field of medicine of your interest, if you choose to. Working as a temporary demonstrator or a research assistant attached to a

department of a medical faculty is one such opportunity. Besides, such a working environment will enable you to interact with consultants of that respective field and will give an exposure to the nature of work of that field.

Being attached to a department of a medical faculty will also invariably involve you with the teaching activities of the students of the faculty and improve your skills of organization. Besides, the environment will be conducive and stimulatory for post graduate education of medicine. Being involved in research is an added benefit of working in a department. And who knows? You might even redefine your views about different fields of medicine.

Moreover, if you are planning to migrate no other time will be as accommodating to sit for IELTS, USMLE or PLAB and whatnot, than your pre-intern year. Together with all of the above, improving your skills of language, communication and computing during this period will be advantageous for your future career as a doctor.

However, attempts to shorten the pre-intern period should also be a duty of the pre-intern medical graduates by means of lobbying the stakeholders, quickening the processing of marks by the faculties and the issuing of the common order of merit (merit list) by the University Grants Commission.

Last but not least, after five years of hard work as an undergraduate, the pre-intern period will be breather for you before the intense year of internship. Therefore it's also a time to focus on family, friends, your partner and yourself. So take time to enjoy the beauty of your youth as well, because medicine alone is not life!

Some day soon, the sun will dawn on the your long awaited internship. Then, if well spent, when you look back you'll have few regrets and be happy your pre-intern year was not in vain!

