

## Advice based on experience

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First let me thank you for inviting me to write an article to your journal.

So you have chosen the field of medicine for your future. Do not change it now.

I of course wanted to be a railway engine driver when I was in the primary school at Ananda College, Maradana. I was fascinated by the size and power of the train engine and its facility to go forwards and backwards with the same power. It was after my father fell ill and a General Practitioner came on a home visit, that I changed my mind. How neatly he was dressed, how he washed his hands before and after seeing my father, how kind he was in asking my father about his illness and how neatly he wrote down the prescription, how respected he was by my family members! Since then I wanted to be a doctor!

Be clean and neatly dressed when you come in the morning to the faculty or National hospital. I had only 2 pairs of long trousers and 2 white shirts at the beginning. I wore longs for the first time in my life on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1967 as I came for registration to the faculty.

Girls must learn to wear the saree if you are Sri Lankan, as taught to us by Prof. Rajasuriya, the former Professor of Medicine. (Also note that the blouse should match in colour!) Do not paint your nails girls. Note that if you meet with an accident crossing either the Kynsey Road, or Reagent Street, the pulse oxymeter won't work on you. Both boys and girls should cut their nails. A lot of bacteria and viruses live under them.

Wear a clean white coat. Wash your underwear at least once a week; you are given Sunday off mainly for this purpose.

Get yourself vaccinated before you come to the wards – vaccines are freely available for you. How many of my batch mates missed vital days due to infectious diseases!

See that your writing pen works well before you come in the morning. Otherwise you may miss noting down a very important part of the lecture. Attend all lectures. They are given by experts on the topics. Write your notes clearly. You have to read them again and again. Also remember to bring enough blank sheets in the morning. Go home and file them neatly under different files for different subjects. We did not have Sony walkmans or IBM computers during our time. Even if you do have them now, file them in Microsoft Word in a methodical manner.

Learn English – it is still the universal language. I did my O' Levels in Sinhala, but my A' Levels in English. My mother was an English teacher at Ananda College. Yet, I found it difficult to follow the early lectures. Buy a plain English Dictionary first, then a medical dictionary and also a BNF as you learn pharmacology.

Your computer has a spell check facility. Use it.

Read the standard text books. Be computer literate. I did not get enough money to buy the best books nor did I have a computer to download electronic texts. So I spent a great deal of my time in the library. Your faculty library is well equipped. Read the Medical, Surgical, Obstetric & Gynaecology and Paediatric journals. Now you can download information from Google. We did not have that facility.

If you do not understand something do not be reluctant to ask the teacher at his convenience.

Mix with your batch mates whether they are Sinhala, Tamil, Burgher, or Muslim. Even though I was a Buddhist I was invited for all Christmas parties and Ramazan. Do not be aloof because of your religion, superior knowledge or wealth.

Take part in some sport. It will help you relax and be fitter.

The National Hospital of Sri Lanka is just across the road. It is one of the largest hospitals in Asia. The variety of patients is unmatched to that of most hospitals in the world. For example, consider the Accident Service. I have worked in the Birmingham Accident Service in UK. It is supposed to be one of the best in the world. Yet, the most serious trauma cases you get in the night are one or two road traffic accident victims. In contrast consider our accident service; bomb blasts, stab injuries, gunshot injuries, burns, multiple road traffic accidents, attempted suicides etc. etc.

When you do a surgical appointment please remember to go early to the ward. I did my first surgical appointment with Dr P.R. Anthonis. He was always sharp on time. We had to go early and see the patients allocated to us or see them the night before.

Learn to introduce your self as a medical student before you take a history. When you examine a patient, ensure privacy. Draw the curtains around the bed. If the patient is a female and you are a male, have another female beside you; a female student or a female attendant. Do not call the only nurse in the ward. She will be too busy.

Go for a night round - at least on the night your unit functions as the casualty ward. I have learned a lot from spending a night in Ward 33. Do not wait till you do the professorial appointments to do a night ward round.

On the operations theatre day know the patients to be operated on from the theatre list. Change your dress completely to theatre clothing except your underwear. Learn to wear a cap and mask correctly. Change your shoes. Do not wear bangles and chains as you may have to scrub. Learn to

scrub correctly once and you will remember it for the rest of your life. Watch the consultant wearing the gloves and learn like I did. If the patient on the table is your patient you may ask the surgeon if you could assist in the operation. I have learned a lot from assisting. Note to learn about working as a team in the operating theatre. You need an anaesthetist, theatre nurses and minor staff to successfully complete an operation. Do not ever forget that!

See your patient post-op in the ward or ICU. This is the best way to learn about post-op care.

When doing Medicine, learn to make a bed side diagnosis from the history and examination of the patient. Only confirm your diagnosis from the investigations. Learn about commonly used drugs, their dosage, side effects and complications. Take the BNF to the ward in your coat pocket other than the stethoscope, knee hammer and pen torch.

To see and learn about children go to the Lady Ridgeway Hospital – a walking distance from your faculty. Learn to be friendly, kind and gentle to the kids. Give them a toy. They will appreciate it more than food. Learn to obtain a history from the parent and then examine the child. It is a fine art.

For Obstetrics and Gynaecology, you have to go to the De Soysa Maternity hospital next to your faculty. Do the number of deliveries allocated to you. Watch a caesarian section. Ask how this operation got its name.

You will remember these 5 years as the BEST period of your life when you reach my age. Do not forget your parents or guardian who supported you during this period, without whom you would have never achieved what you have.