

King Arthur's dowry and the medical students' legacy

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King Arthur was a legendary king, who defended Britain against the Saxon invaders in the 6th century. It is said that he utilized a round table, around which his Knights sat to discuss matters that were crucial to the security of the realm. Although Arthur had to marry Guinevere in order to own this precious table, the Colombo medical students are fortunate enough to get its benefits no sooner than they enter the faculty. Yet it sometimes takes time for us to understand the value of this privilege...

When I was a first year medical student, the three words that I categorized as heavy or stressful were "Examinations", "Presentations" and "Small Group Discussions (SGDs)". Since I could not prevent the confrontation with the former, the natural tendency of avoidance was executed for the last two, as I perceived them to "threaten my well being and coping abilities". Of the two, SGDs were more frequently to be battled with and curses were most often directed to its founders. King Arthur narrowly escaped as I did not know about him or his round table at that time.

Things changed dramatically one day when I was randomly selected to be the chairperson at a SGD in Behavioural Sciences. Although I tried to avoid the offer by saying that I had been the chairperson previously, the cleverer facilitator outdid me by saying "then it would be easier for you to conduct the SGD this time". For a moment I was at a loss, dumb-founded and motionless. What came to my mind were echoing questions like "will I stammer, will I sweat, will my performance not impress the girls" etc. With the overflow of adrenaline inside the body, "flight" was not an option, and at last I agreed to "fight". Little by little I became relaxed and gradually realized that SGDs are not something beyond reach, as skills can be learnt it needed only the will.

With time and with more SGDs to bolster our experience, we sat in a circle like the famed

Knights of King Arthur and life became pleasant. We discussed, argued, laughed and most importantly enjoyed. The equal circular pattern without a "position of privilege" was an ideal forum for us to broaden our knowledge as well as to sharpen our communication skills. The experiences at the SGDs guided us to be assertive than being passive or aggressive. Furthermore it helped us to get rid of "groupthink" where one's mental efficiency is reduced due to the desire to reach a consensus. For a medical student, it enhances confidence, which is of utmost importance when performing in front of examiners. These happy discussions of ours not only bring smiles whenever remembered, but also compelled me to search for the history of SGDs up to King Arthur's time.

I am sure that my opinion represents the views of a majority of my friends. However, there were a minority who continued to hate SGDs until the end. They were not idiots, but brilliant students whom I considered as "unfortunate to perceive SGDs in a different manner". They are unfortunate not because they did not perform or contribute at the SGDs, but because they missed the sweet memories that they would have never forgotten. Once you do not accept the challenge, the objective changes from "contribution" to "survival". Survival is devoid of joy.

Yet the promising sign we saw as pre-interns is that the students of recent batches are more willing to contribute during SGDs, which are without doubt heading towards the optimum outcome at the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo.

King Arthur's words go as "if you be of prowess and of worthiness then you shall be a true Knight of the Table Round". Likewise if we decide to contribute more and get involved more in SGDs, then we would be the true winners at the ideal forum.