

REFLECTIONS ON EXITING RESIDENCY

Text and photo by
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"The days are long but the years are short" – Gretchen Rubin

I came across this quote as I stood in the twilight of my residency and thought it to be very apt. Each work day was long, but residency as a whole indeed went by rapidly. The transition from days of long operating lists and adrenaline-filled calls to an extended study leave for the exit examination was quite abrupt. One day we were buried in work and suddenly, the next was much like medical school again. Examination preparation went past in a haze of examining patients, practising vivas and analysing journal articles.

Throughout this period, it was the people around me who helped me stay sane – from juniors and peers who took on extra work to allow us time off to study, to seniors who

organised mock examinations and grilled us mercilessly. Not to forget our study group that took pains to ensure no man was left behind and made the entire experience memorable (though still not quite enjoyable!)

Upon getting that magical sheet of paper, the most dominant feeling my peers and I had was sheer relief. Relief at having cleared the last major examination in my life (I hope!), finally being able to restart a life that had been put on hold for so long, and not having to put my wife and family through another round of my prolonged absence in the evenings and weekends. Though it's possible that they were secretly enjoying that last bit (*hmmm...*).

Returning to work was probably a different experience for each of us.

For me, it was surprisingly easy to get back into the swing of things. The sun still rose, the night still fell, and work went on much the same as it had for the past few years. General surgery is an apprenticeship and there is still much for me to learn from the master surgeons. The examination was just one step on this journey, and I expect that the responsibilities and scope of work will change with time and experience, just as it had over the past years.

The biggest difference I have noticed thus far is relief from the administrative burden that comes with residency, such as filing case logs and duty hours. This task is the opposite of the quote above – they may seem to take up a trivial amount of time, but only when I no longer had to do it did I realise just how much effort it took! I have therefore been able to catch up on some of the things I've had to forsake over these past few years, such as reading. To those waiting their turn – I leave you with this quote:

"And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same." – Marianne Williamson ♦

Legend

1. National Healthcare Group examination survivors

Dr Sunder has just completed his National Healthcare Group General Surgery residency and aspires to be a trauma surgeon. He spends just enough time at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and too little time on exercise and Dota. He aims to correct this as soon as possible.

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