

# Non-Sunscreen Advice

Dr Terence Lim, MBBS 2000

A famous doctor said the most important attribute to being a good physician is calmness of spirit; serenity amidst the storm. And calmness despite merely academic setbacks is good practice.

***"If I could offer you only one tip for the future, sunscreen would be it." The long term benefits of sunscreen have been proven by scientists, whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own meandering experience.***

About a year back, these words, played to hip-hop dance music jammed the local and international airways. I recall hearing it for the first time on MTV USA, the day before my clinical electives in Philadelphia were to start, and thinking 'if I could write like that, I'd quit medicine tomorrow. The above quote contains just the opening sentences. The actual track lasts about 3 mins, and contains such consoling gems as 'the race is long and in the end, it's only with yourself' and 'you are not as fat as you imagine'. Advice you can dance to indeed.

A little background for our non-MTV-watching readers about how this lil ditty came to be.

Some opportunistic DJ took a mock graduation speech written by Chicago Tribune columnist Mary Schmich, put a funky dance tune in the background, released the resulting work to music stations, and the rest is pop history. For those who have not heard it, the point to grasp is this: the words are not sung, the dance music is in the background. There is no melody line to the words at all. Amazing what passes off as pop music these days huh? Still it's a seminal work considering how boybands, preteen girls and remixes have taken over the charts in recent years.

Certainly I lack the years to attempt a similar endeavor; writing a mock graduation speech I mean. But here is some non-sunscreen advice culled from my own meandering experience in medschool, that might be of interest to our M1 friends. If any of you wants to put dance music to it and make me rich,

do keep me informed. You know the caveats. Consider yourself warned.

MEDSCHOOL IS TO TEACH YOU HOW TO BE LOW CLASS HOUSEMAN. TRUE OR FALSE?

Probably both. A former surgical tutor kept emphasizing the low class houseman part to my clinical group. And frankly, we found it pretty consoling. Still, the process of becoming a low class houseman is not a straightforward one. There is the science bit which hopefully you will be as well taught as me. Then there is the art bit which hopefully you will be better taught than me. For times and seasons have changed, and as a senior doctor mentioned at a recent hospital dinner, "we have moved from being national liabilities to assets". So your medschool experience will certainly differ from mine. We are now part of a new economic wing. Repeat the magic words: Life Science Industry. Who knows, the EDB might be sponsoring your white coats soon, with a little help from Goldman Sachs perhaps. Still, I am certain your teachers will be emphasising some even more magical words, like The patient first.

GETTING AN MBBS IS GETTING AN EDUCATION. TRUE OR FALSE?

False. And shame on you if you get this one wrong. So I define education broadly. But looking at all your excellent A level grades, you'd be selling yourself short if you spend all your non academic time reading ever thicker reference books on esoteric medical conditions rather than exposing your self to 'outside stuff'. So seek experiences, open your mind. Speak out and be not afraid. There is really nothing like the arrogance of youth. Don't whisper and complain to your friends yet keep quiet when someone asks for your opinion. You know what they say about

cowards dying a thousand deaths. If you are not idealistic when young, don't expect miracles in middle age.

As a first step, can someone ask MOH how the exact value of our bond was arrived at. Failing that please try petitioning for toilets on the second floor of the medical library.

TRY TO FAIL ONE TEST IN FIRST YEAR

What the heck, just for the experience, you overachieving do-gooder. It'd be a life transforming step. It was for me. Especially if you are one of those who have never failed an assessment prior to university, except maybe the truly life(style) improving ones such as the driving test.

Yes, university is the time to grow up and be less JC, less Singaporean about grades, or at least appear to be. If you manage to quell that need-to-perform attitude in M1, you are at least 3 years ahead of me. Well done. A famous doctor said the most important attribute to being a good physician is calmness of spirit; serenity amidst the storm. And calmness despite merely academic setbacks is good practice. Hopefully you'll have as constructive parents as mine who'd say 'fail so what'.

BUT SERIOUSLY, THERE IS ACTUALLY A POINT IN KNOWING SOME ANATOMY

As to exactly what that point is, you might not grasp it till sometime in the middle of this decade. Still, there is a point. What I am trying to illustrate is this: the study of medicine is one of those truly odd adventures. In order to see the forest (of medicine), you often have to know the trees (say anatomy) first. So don't sweat if it is all Greek to you at first. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

Medicine is different from other

# Pricing of Medicines

Extracted from SMA publication, "The Medical Profession & Pharmaceuticals" November 1998, page 11-12.

## Dispensed In-Clinic & Prescription Fees

### 1. MEDICINE FEES

Prices comparable to those charged at a pharmacy are an acceptable upper limit. When this is not known, the following are some suggested acceptable alternatives.

1. When the price of the medicine is listed in a drug index such as DIMS, the list price of the single-user pack size can be used.
2. When the above is not available, the list price quoted by the manufacturer or the distributor can be used. When this list price is not available, up to 1.25 times the nett price for the single-user pack size is acceptable.
3. Where neither the list nor nett prices of the single-user pack size is available (eg. bulk-packed medicine), up to twice the per-unit cost of bulk-packed medicine is acceptable.

4. For very low-cost medicine, a rounding up to 10 cents per tablet/capsule, \$1.50 per 5g of cream, or \$1.50 per 30ml of mixture, is acceptable. Alternatively, a rounded-up charge of \$2 per each medicine dispensed, for up to a week, is acceptable.

Summary of methods of calculating Medicine Charge, in order of preference.

1. Pharmacy Price
2. DIMS List Price
3. Manufacturer's/Distributor's List Price
4. 1.25 x Nett Price
5. 2 x Bulk-packed Price
6. Rounded-up Price or Charge-per-item Price

### 2. PRESCRIPTION FEES

Under ordinary circumstances, prescribing is part of the in-clinic consultation, and

no separate prescription fee should be charged. This applies even if the patient requests during the consultation that the medicine be dispensed outside the clinic.

However, a prescription fee may be appropriate when the patient is not physically present for a formal consultation and examination, as a professional review of his medical records before prescribing medicine is appropriate. One example may be when a relative requests repeat medicine for a stable housebound patient of the doctor. Another is when clinical or laboratory data needs to be reviewed before a repeat prescription. In such cases, a prescription fee of up to \$10 for up to a month's supply of medicine is acceptable, provided the usual consultation fee is not charged. ■

### ◀ Page 10 – Non-Sunscreen Advice

pursuits like the humanities where entire social movements (say postmodernism) can be well described before even getting into the specifics of what constitutes their individual facets (say the postmodernist novel or skyscraper).

This is highlighted by the fact that almost all standard textbooks present facts vertically, though in practice, such knowledge is applied horizontally. Certainly there are many good 'problem oriented' books which go some way to addressing this vertical/horizontal dilemma. But there is nothing like a good tutor to show you the ropes and most importantly, tell you which paragraphs to skip, the voluminous books to keep away from, and what you do not have to know. Which brings me to the next point.

### THE TERM PROFESSOR IS A JOB DESCRIPTION

I came from a secondary school where we called all male teachers sir, and the ladies madam. Something about teaching young men to be scholars, officers and gentleman. A laudable effort certainly, but it did not make us respect them

more, though it did save us the effort of remembering actual names.

In the same way, you'd meet Prof this and Prof that at tutorials and lectures. Don't be overawed by titles. Having a academic one does not make them better doctors or more importantly, better people. What is better anyway? So judge them worthy of respect as you would any other man. You would want them to judge you similarly.

Your tutors were once medical students too although some might talk as if they went straight from diapers to gene sequencing. Try not to be too harsh on them, they might be working for you someday.

### GET TO KNOW MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS AND INVESTMENT BANKERS

It is never too early to find out what the rest of your former classmates will be doing. And especially, how much they will be earning. Once you accept the fact that people you 'outperformed' all through school will have expense accounts more than your monthly salary, working life will be less frustrating. You will feel less disgruntled about night

calls that seem to stretch into eternity, and our civil service medical benefits.

Perhaps you can then tell the corporate types all about the intangibles they are missing out on, despite the frequent flyer privileges and 6 month bonuses. Failing which you can of course take an MBA and join a dot.com.

### GO FORTH

***"Be careful whose advice you buy, but be patient with those who supply it. Advice is a form of nostalgia. Dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it's worth."***

So ends the 'song'. Each of you will have your own song soon. But allow me to leave you with some suggestions on what to do during your first term in medschool, the really crucial stuff.

- Don't rush to buy any textbook you can borrow.
- Start brushing up on your Hokkien and Malay.
- Get one of those '11th free after 10 coffees' cards from Spinellis at the Science Canteen.

And remember to have fun. ■