



SPECIALIST TRAINING IN SINGAPORE

Dear Hobbit,

To 'Luke "Tian" Walker' and 'Singapore Girl' (*SMA News* 2005; 37(9):12-4), I say, welcome to Singapore, where a certain few distinguished professors still rule the internal medicine STC; where foreign talent (that is, must not be Singaporean, and preferably speak with accent even better) is revered and given the red carpet treatment while our own local graduates are taken for granted; where I feel that the rules can change unexpectedly with no clear reasons given. The fact that you came back at Medical Officer level means you are not quite 'foreign talent'. The only difference between you and your fellow Medical Officers who are local graduates, is that the latter have known that this was a con job all along and have accepted their lot (and bond).

You are not alone. There are tons of people in the same boat as you. I have one friend who has made a name for himself in medical research internationally, and yet the STC will not recognise him as having completed his BST. Another friend who has done more relevant Medical Officer postings than most AST trainees, has also been denied BST recognition just because she applied for BST traineeship late, and most of her postings were done before

she was a trainee. The biggest joke is that she has been told by the STC that she is too young to complete BST when she is older than most Registrars! Thus, these two talented (read 'assets to Singapore Medicine') have been held back from AST because of some (short-sighted?) decisions made by the STC.

What about the issue about having to be a BST trainee in internal medicine in order to get AST? I have friends who have returned to Singapore after completing MRCP overseas (I guess they must qualify as 'foreign talent?'), and they have managed to get AST training posts (without spending a single day as a Medical Officer in our hospitals), and even been allowed to back-date their time overseas to be counted for AST. Some of them are not even Singaporean citizens. So, who should we believe?

I don't blame you for getting confused. All this inflexibility, double standards and lack of foresight seem so contradictory to Singapore's overall ambition to be at the forefront of medical research and be a Medical Hub (sic). So, the best will always leave for greener pastures. I mean, if your own country gives you such a hard time, and a prestigious institution overseas welcomes you, why on earth are you ('Singapore Girl') hanging around?

So, I say to those who are still working overseas, don't come back till you are a Consultant or Professor, then you can return on expatriate terms (with housing allowance and so on thrown in)! And to those who are already stuck here but are told that they need to be a BST trainee before they can even dream of applying for AST, well, see my story above.

For the record, I am an overseas graduate myself, but I came back ages ago and took so long to finish my MRCP that there was no question about me not fulfilling the BST criteria. So, no, I didn't give the STC an opportunity to give me a hard time. But I have seen enough of my friends tormented and stifled just because of the decisions made by a few in the internal medicine STC who aren't listening to the cries of Medical Officers because they are too cosy in their ivory tower.

To the STC committee: There is a big group of disgruntled Medical Officers in the hospitals who could do so much better and achieve so much more if only you would allow them to!

Yours with all sincerity,
Don't-persecute-your-own-please Doctor

Dear Hobbit,

You never walked alone.

I read with great interest, letters from 'Singapore Girl, Frustrated MOS, UK Grad' and 'Dr Luke "Tian" Walker, Deceived UK Grad' (*SMA News* 2005; 37(9):12-4). Let me assure them that Singaporean trainees are not better off than foreign trainees. It is whether you are part of the ivory tower in STC. If you have the misfortune of being excluded from the 'inner circle', any postgraduate degree will not help, however prestigious they are. If your services are appreciated, at least there is light after the required 'training'. Otherwise, you are considered lucky if you get to practise your specialty skill at a Medical Officer's remuneration. Somehow, there is supposed to be a difference in the training you get from a posting when you are a trainee and when you are not.

I was 'lucky' because I was not 'intelligent' enough to pass the postgraduate exam. Otherwise, I will be a stepchild like so many others.

From:
Wormie, the lucky one that got away

THE BEST IS YET TO BE

Dear Editor,

I mulled over this problem for quite some time: whether it would be considered the 'proper thing' to contribute a vignette on the ACS Motto to the *SMA News*.

What decided me was this: many ACS Old Boys and 'Old Girls' are members of the SMA. Some are old enough to have children and grandchildren in the ACS Family of Schools! Other doctors (who wished they had been to ACS) also have children and grandchildren in ACS. Moreover, the motto is applicable to the medical profession.

The ACS motto is often quoted by ACS Old Boys and 'Old Girls', principals, teachers and students of the ACS Schools and Junior College. Recently, I read in the papers of it being quoted by politicians who are not ACS Old Boys.

What has puzzled me in my years of reading is the fact that nobody has ever quoted the full verse from which the motto is taken. The full verse expresses with appropriate feeling the sentiments behind the favourite line: THE BEST IS YET TO BE. Knowing it makes quoting the motto even more meaningful. Mere Latin tags are not emotive enough.

I felt that before I go to the place where medically-qualified ACS Old Boys are supposed to go to when the call comes, I should write the verse down for posterity:

*Live not in glories
of the years gone by,
Nor o'er your failures
droop and die.
The past is dead,
In years ahead,
THE BEST IS YET TO BE.*

Yours sincerely,
Prof Lee Yong Kiat ■

Disclaimer: The letters reflect the personal opinions of the writers, and do not represent those of the Editorial Board or the SMA Council.