

By Dr Lim Boon Leng

# The Woes of a Junior Doctor

Being a medical officer is probably the most unenviable stage of a doctor's life. You think that things are looking up after surviving housemanship and then BANG! You get hit with traineeship fees, examination fees and the scariest of them all, income tax! But unlike income tax, there are no interest-free installments for your traineeship or examination fees. Not even if you own the UOB-SMA Platinum credit card!



So what is it that most junior doctors worry about? There was really no time for me to conduct a longitudinal study with a validated questionnaire. The Specialist Training Committee was chasing us for our logbooks and I had a deadline to meet for this article. Therefore, I took a cross-sectional approach with  $n=1$ .

While the truth is that money is a big *problemo*, with my Part 2 examination round the corner, I would rather be politically correct. Actually, training woes had already been covered extensively in the September 2005 issue of *SMA News* by the Hobbit. I dare not trample upon the holy ground that he/she has treaded. *I'm not worthy!*

Then I saw this episode of *Jewel of the Palace* (*Daejanggeum*), which helped change my perspective on the state of training locally. *Jewel of the Palace* is a 60-episode epic Korean drama about Janggeum, a gifted palace-cook-turned-physician, whose perseverance not only won her the emperor's heart but also drove her

enemies to their graves. While training as a court physician, she was persecuted by her professor as she illegally treated a patient before getting her MBBS equivalent. Those days, medical training lasted only six months, *dunno why she can't wait*. Instead of crying foul play for the unfair treatment or complaining that training was lousy, Janggeum volunteered to wash the clothes of all her classmates, just to show her sincerity. I am not about to wash my fellow trainees' underwear (I have no idea how to work a washing machine and I get contact dermatitis with washing powder) but her humility and sincerity for the art of healing did touch me.

Besides not spending enough time on training because TV shows are too enticing (I read from *SMA News* that *House, M.D.* is really cool! Tsk tsk tsk, bad influence.), junior doctors also face the woes of financial difficulties. Most doctors get married during their time as medical officers. This poses a huge financial burden on the poor MO who has to pay for the



Boon Leng is a psychiatry trainee who found out recently that diapers were indeed quite expensive. He is currently busy hunting for a *nee tu* (pacifier) that his wailing baby will take to.

To be fair, who can we blame but ourselves for our financial woes?

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traditional wedding dinner and the huge rock on the bride's fourth finger.

And as model citizens, many of us responded positively (maybe too positively) to our nation's cries for more babies. This will no doubt compound the problem, as you will then have to also employ a maid to help your gravid wife. I do hope that they include the maid as a member of the family when means-testing is implemented. After all, we are told to treat maids like part of the family and they are really indispensable (I have no idea how to work a washing machine and I get contact dermatitis with washing powder). Fortunately, the government is handing out baby bonuses. That will really help pay for my exams next year.

To be fair, who can we blame but ourselves for our financial woes? *Who ask you go and buy car when we have 'world- class public transport system'?* Then again, we all thought that COEs were at an all-time low and car prices had hit rock bottom. At least you know that the chest discomfort you get every time COE prices drop further and petrol prices rocket skywards are somatic in nature.

Speaking of rocketing prices, my SMA subscription fee never fails to increase and will not be waived even if I contribute articles (*wah lau!*). I also hear that, like baseball, you get a *strike out* if you do not pay membership fees three years in a row. I wonder if they offer financial assistance because it is really quite *paiseh* to be blacklisted and I *really love* their *Sensory* magazine. The way this magazine depicts the lifestyle of doctors never fails to amaze me: diamonds, Swiss watches, exotic vacations, golf clubs ... The only club this doctor ever goes to is the weekly journal club.

I would love to go on rambling like some of my patients sometimes do in the clinics. But unlike them, I really have to go back to updating my training logbook and start preparing for my examinations. After I finish the last ten episodes of *Jewel of the Palace*, that is! ■



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