

By Dr Lim Boon Leng



Memoirs of an MO

When I was a medical student, my clinical group mates and I used to help the beleaguered houseman (HO) bleed patients. Once, after a round of blood-taking, we were resting by the nursing counter, drenched in sweat, lamenting at how the poor houseman (HO) was slogging away and wondering if things would get better, when a medical officer (MO) appeared from nowhere and exclaimed,

“It goes downhill from here, you fools! It never gets better! NEVER! Muah-ha-ha-hah!”

We shuddered with fear in our white coats as he walked off laughing at us.

I never had the chance to strike such despondence in medical students since they do not often appear in this part of the medical fraternity where I work. But I do know now that the MO was simply laughing at himself. Having been mostly HO-MO for the past few years, his words resonate well with me. It really has not been the most gay of times.

I touched on some of the pertinent issues junior doctors face in my previous article “The Woes of a Junior Doctor” for the January issue of the *SMA News*. It will not be wise for me to continue whining, like how some medical students did on learning empathy in communication classes. After all, as MOs, we do pride ourselves on being more mature. We are also really much busier with work and reading journal articles.

Of course, the advent of technology means that we can now access journal articles online. In fact, most work can be performed comfortably in

front of the computer. The system is really secure too – you are asked ever so often to change your passwords (and the last four passwords cannot be used again). So much so that I am down to using my third aunt’s second cousin’s fourth son’s birth date as a password. Luckily, I can remember all the nine different passwords (and birth dates) necessary. Now I just need to call the IT helpdesk to determine which password accesses which programme.

Despite these technological advances, our poor nurses are still very busy inking up pages of reports. The junior doctors are also kept busy inking so that we will note what the nurses have inked up. If you are confused and think you can just *siam* all this inking, think again, for you will be hunted down to do your fair share of inking.

Even though all this inking may be quite irking, the mother of all worries for junior doctors must still be the fear of remaining one. Not found in any illness classification, “chronic MO-ship” is a syndrome characterised by increasing irritability, failure to wake up for work in the morning and fleeting daydreams of throwing the pager into the bin and *Leaving On a Jet Plane* (my favourite on-call song). Most of us, however, have enough insight to realise that we are too institutionalised to survive in the big-fish-eat-small-fish world beyond the hospital.

At the end stage, the chronic MO may even develop severe paranoia thinking that he is the target of an unfair system just because his past postings did not get accredited.

Unbeknownst to him, inking and remembering passwords do not count as training. ■



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.