

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

Experience of a Radiology "Resident"

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I am not a resident in Radiology in the true sense of the word, but, I am what the Administration refers to as a rotating resident (T2). I have now spent almost 8 months in the Radiology Department at Salmaniya Medical Centre (SMC). I applied for a residency in Radiology several months ago, and the final verdict is still awaited.

Well, I think it is premature to talk about my experience in the Department yet. But it may be interesting to share personal thoughts with teachers and friends.

I joined the Department on November 6, 1992 with absolutely no intention what so-ever to apply for straight residency. It was going to be a 2-months of call-free rotation and I intended to call it my 'honey-moon' rotation.

It was not the first time I have worked in a Radiology Department but it was the first time that I felt lost or shall I say abandoned in the maze. The general impression was:

***"Here are your waters and your watering place,
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion"***

Robert Frost (1947)

Everyone in the Department is so busy, so very busy. There is always something or the other happening, I felt I was indeed "in the way" and the feeling of being an alien makes you want not to miss a chance to escape. But in the midst of all this confusion, I fell in love with Radiology, although it was not love at first sight. I remember feeling sorry for everyone and how much they were all missing; there is no time to spare for coffee, no time to read or discuss, and absolutely no time to participate in other hospital activities. I imagined the Department to be a cage where everyone moves so hurriedly within a limited space.

They say "a teacher affects eternity, he can never tell where his influence stops". I was influenced by some inspiring teachers here. These radiologists communicated their enthusiasm for radiology to me. Slowly I felt that I was wanting to know more and get more involved. It was *then* that I realised the limitations of this Department especially in training at the residency level.

I am going to complete 8 months in this Department, out of which my first 2 months, I feel, were a waste.

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** This personal communication had been discussed in the weekly academic activities of the Department of Radiology, SMC. It reflects the author's opinion. Responses to this communication are welcome. Experiences of residents in other Departments of similar or different nature can be sent to the following address: Chief Editor, Bahrain Medical Bulletin, P.O. Box 32159, Bahrain.

Everything was so haphazard; no continuity. I kept on jumping each day from CT Scan, USG, IVU to Bariums, and most of the time I felt isolated, not aware of what was really going on, and too embarrassed to ask the "I don't know question".

Doctors here are willing to teach but too busy to offer you proper guidance. Slowly, you feel isolated in the maze, cannot tell the entrance from the exit and no doubt you are bound to get into some blind passages.

Radiology seemed like a safe haven to me, a very stimulating branch of medicine, it kindled in me the intellectual challenge of diagnosis. I wanted to be a good radiologist. I wanted to learn, to achieve, to give my absolute, full, complete and undivided attention to Radiology but did not know how. I was receiving useful tips from people around me but I feel that I was misreading them. I needed direction and guidance and felt bitter and frustrated that I was not receiving a formal training.

My decision to stay in Radiology created a riot at home. My family views on Radiology were indeed not promising but thank God, I won the battle at home yet I am still fighting it out here in the Hospital.

Next came the issue of being accepted for fixation and that was the most turbulent time I have experienced so far. It did not take me long to realise that, unfortunately, there is no defined programme for training and I could tell that this Department is in no way designed for training residents.

I must confess that I too have made mistakes and the mistake I regret is having been so obsessed with the idea of getting fixed in the Department thinking of it as an end rather than a means. This led me to a series of disappointments and empty promises. I suddenly found myself losing interest and finding it difficult to adapt to this "special kind" of alternate learning process. I should have worked harder, read more and made the most of the limited facilities available rather than waste myself in this obsession.

Soon, I realised that to survive in this Department one must have:

- a) Persistence
- b) Interest, attitudes, behaviour and personal

inclinations compatible with a career in Radiology. This I feel an average graduate will not be able to cope with.

- c) Unless time and combined efforts of residents, faculty, programme directors or administrators are out to design and implement an effective training programme, this department will continue to lose potential fine diagnostic radiologists.

The Radiology Department in SMC serves the whole of Bahrain. The staff are so overworked, so understaffed, and yet they still want to instruct programmes in continuing Medical Education. The radiologists are eager to teach, but, where are the facilities and the time? Yet it is not as bad as it sounds I believe. Even with these limited facilities we can do something; perhaps have small working groups. Residents must be taught a systematic approach to interpret images, how to interact with radiologists, proper sequencing of imaging studies, basic concepts of Radiology and the role of radiologists in patient management.

The study of diagnostic radiology has changed almost out of recognition, the explosion of information is so overwhelming that unless guidance is given, a resident will definitely experience academic difficulties and may be doomed to failure if he/she is abandoned in the maze. The faculty must offer support and guidance.

Finally, I must admit that I have learned something from almost everyone in the Department and that in spite of all the increasing complexities of having to be here without a formal residency training programme, in spite of all the red-tape, I would still choose to do Radiology and participate in this exciting intellectual challenge, yet I dream of good training and a strong sound radiological foundation. I would like to end my 'personal view' with this quotation:

"The radiologist perceives a shadow, sees a lesion and imagines the man. The bed-side clinician sees a man, perceives the signs and imagines the lesion. They practice from outside - in, and we practice from inside - out. Both are clinicians for, in truth, there is no other kind of doctor worthy of the name".

Dr Harry Mellins
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