

# PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

## Metamorphosis

Hakeema Al-Hashimi, MBBS\*

I took a deep but laboured breath, rubbed my sweaty hands against my crispy white coat and pulled the door open. Today was going to be a momentous day in my life. I looked around hoping to meet someone familiar and friendly, but was disappointed. Newcomers to the place are viewed as 'strangers' and can be treated with indifference, if not suspicion.

Trying to put on a brave front, I plucked up all my courage and stood by the nurses' station. A couple of them gave me side glances and carried on with their work. It was here that I remembered my friend's advice - "try and win the nurses' approval and blessings from the first day .... cos' they usually are impressionists". I smiled and walked away, not wanting to spoil my chances of a peaceful existence with the nurses.

It was after some time that I found my way to the secretary's office where I was told that I would be working in the General Medicine Ward; with this I was given the 'Sacred' duty rota (which one should accept like the sacred scriptures and not alter) for the month, and there was my name in black and white, squeezed uncomfortably among unfamiliar alphabets. I was to take calls in a few days time. This thought haunted me in

my awakening hours and sometimes visited me in my sleep too.

I started internship with minimal practice. As a medical student I attended lectures and was spoon-fed. I must mention here that internship is the period when conventional medical education takes a break.... you are usually abandoned to self-education. It is important not to feel bitter or disheartened at this stage because you are bound to feel confused; that is part of the deal. Just like my paediatric professor in medical school refers to adolescents as "adults without sense", I think of interns as "doctors without sense". They are confused, scared and uncertain, always seeking approval and encouragement. Insecure about the sudden transformation into responsible doctors, they need continuous support and should not be overburdened with responsibility or criticism. I knew that internship was going to be a painful weaning phase.

My head was packed with theoretical knowledge and the few practical skills I had were drawing blood, starting IV lines and suturing my bed sheet and "banana skin". Actually my "banana skin" was my pride; I taught myself suturing by observation and practising on those poor bananas.

---

\* Resident  
Radiology Department  
Salmaniya Medical Centre  
State of Bahrain

When you are an intern, people working with you view you cautiously because they can never really know how much you know or how much you really want to know. Therefore:

**Rule No. 1: "Always remain interested and never give up ... Be confident".**

I was assigned a ward where I was to take care of 26 patients. It was a challenge and I had to carry on with only occasional doses of guidance and practically no teaching. By hook or crook, I managed to safe-sail through that 'turbulent' year of the making of a doctor, but there were moments when I felt anger because of my inadequacies. However, these moments were balanced by the pride of being able to contribute positively towards the care of my patients.

I am writing all this in memory of a friend, a college mate, who decided to quit medicine immediately after completing internship because she claimed that she was

disillusioned by this "superhuman profession". I still wonder why this happened and who was to blame, how and who made her so miserable. It was too late to offer any support to her because no one then really evaluated the performance of interns or did anything reformatory about it. It seemed like a rat-race, no place for quitters, just move-on and achieve.

For the memory of my friend who is now a "successful" "person" I write this quote:-

*We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it and stop there, lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid.*

*She will never sit down on a hot stove lid again – and that is well; but also she will never sit down on a cold one any more"*

Mark Twain