



Things I never knew about med school

NARDIN KIROLOS [MED 3]

MARKS DON'T MATTER

This was probably one of the hardest concepts to grasp coming from undergrad where marks really do matter and there's no such thing as just passing and getting by. Most medical schools have moved into a pass/fail system - where they might vary in where they draw the line of passing; some being at a grade of 60, others at 70. Regardless of the actual numerical value, I have found that this is one of the best "gifts" that medical schools can provide their students. It's not to say that it's "easy" to pass, but having a simple "PASS" on your transcript takes the edge off when you're studying and makes the whole experience a whole lot more enjoyable. Because you're not striving for those high 80s/90s, you have a lot more time on your hands to explore hobbies that you dropped in undergrad, do electives to find out what in medicine actually interests you, and volunteer for causes that you're passionate about. I've found that my life has done a complete 180 in some ways as I'm still studying most days, but that's not the bulk of my day. I have a lot more time to really do things that I'm passionate about that have nothing to do with school or medicine.

UPPER YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS ARE ONE OF THE BEST RESOURCES YOU CAN FIND

In my undergrad, I used to ask upper year students about specific courses that I was planning on taking or professors that were teaching and I always found their advice useful, but I never felt like I would be missing out without their advice. The same is not true now in medical school. I'm finding that more than ever upper year students are an invaluable resource on ALL matters. The curriculum doesn't tend to change dramatically from year to year and so upper years know which content is higher yield. On top of that, they have notes and tips and tricks for getting the material down in the simplest ways. And aside from their academic help, they also have experiences doing electives, research, managing clubs and groups and so their scope of knowledge is undeniable. I've really learned lately that it never hurts to ask them questions; students that are further along in their education know exactly where you've been and therefore are always open to sharing their experiences and helping you make it through in the most seamless way.



IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO NOT COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS

This one was a tough one. You know how hard it is to work towards medical school and once you've made it, there is a huge sense of accomplishment for being able to get there, as you know how many other well deserving applicants weren't able to be in your shoes. But once you're in, you can feel as though you're back to square one. You spend most of your undergrad working hard to be at the top of your class, but once you're in medical school, you soon realize that your colleagues were also at the top of their classes. Everyone has unique volunteer/research/life experiences and so it's easy to feel like yours don't compare. It's easy for medical students to experience imposter syndrome and feel that they don't belong amongst their colleagues. Therefore, it's more important than ever to remind yourself at this stage of all the hard work that you've done to get to this point and to focus on your achievements, rather than others. This is a great skill to develop, even as early as in undergrad, because on this medical career journey, you will constantly encounter other high achieving individuals, whether in residency, fellowship or even as a staff, and it's important to remember that their achievements don't take away from yours.

NO ONE EVER REALLY TELLS YOU WHAT EACH MEDICAL SPECIALTY ENTAILS

Going into medical school, all the specialties and subspecialties that exist were a bit of a mystery to me and honestly, the mystery has yet to fully clear. Although medical schools spend a great deal of time in your pre-clerkship years providing you with the basic knowledge in all (or at least almost all) specialties, they don't do as good of a job in telling you what working in that specialty is really like. This is where you as a medical student have to take initiative to help clear this mystery for yourself. You have to speak to the doctors that come to lecture you and ask them directly about their experiences in the specialty, take part in electives where you can further immerse yourself in the specialty and go to events that help you get a better sense of what every specialty has to offer. Now even with all that, it's okay for you to still not know what you want to do before clerkship because that's when you really get to try your hand at things. However, doing these things in advance at least gives you more insight and if not to tell you what you are interested in, these things can help you narrow down things that you are not interested in.

THERE'S STILL A LOT OF "TRYING" THAT YOU HAVE TO DO

As nice as it would be to say that once you're in medical school, you can stop "trying" completely; that's not exactly the reality of things. This career is truly a journey and not something you can rush through. It's therefore extremely important to pace yourself from the beginning so as to avoid getting burnt out along the way. Depending on what specialty you are interested in, following medical school you can have additional years in training for residency, sub-specializations, fellowships, research etc. This isn't meant to be overwhelming to hear, but a reminder that the medical journey is convoluted and long so developing good strategies for time management, relaxation, mindfulness will go a long way and keep you in the right headspace to keep going and achieve your ultimate goals.



It's easy to always tell yourself that you'll develop these good strategies when the time comes, but the truth is there never really is a "good time" and you might find that you get busier as your career takes off so the earlier you develop these strategies the better!

WHEN IT COMES TO STUDYING, IT'S REALLY ABOUT QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

There will always be lectures filled with minute details that you don't find interesting or all that clinically relevant. Based on my experience in undergrad, I found that that's exactly where most of my professors loved to get their questions from. Therefore, I always felt like I had to go over those details, even if I didn't particularly understand them and so I would just end up memorizing them. This is another big way in which my studying in medical school has changed. Now, it's not to say that there won't be details that sometimes show up on the exam, but for the most part you're learning for your future career! I've found that at this stage, it's important to discern which details are clinically relevant and would help in future diagnoses and treatment and which might just be interesting facts. This has changed so much about the way that I study and really made studying a lot more enjoyable. I'm learning for the purpose of having this knowledge for my future career, not for the purpose of achieving certain grades. Since I spend less time on those details, I have more time to study the clinical information and grow my knowledge that way.

THERE'S A SECOND MATCH FOR SUBSPECIALITIES

This is something that I was pretty unaware of. I knew that following an initial residency, if you wanted to subspecialize further you would have to complete fellowships and additional training but I wasn't aware before medical school that to apply for these, a second round of CaRMS was required. Again if you didn't know this like me, this news isn't meant to make the medical journey seem daunting; it's only to reaffirm that there is a lot that a career in this field requires of you, and so it's important to take care of yourself and to not put off self-care until a later time because you don't know when that time will come. I'm learning now more than ever that it's important that medicine doesn't become the focal point of your life, but a part of it. And that's easier said than done; it's easy to fall into a pattern of just school or just work, and it takes some practice and effort to prioritize other things in your life (even if this means that your career/ school don't flourish as much during that time).

"SUCCESS IS NOT A DESTINATION, IT'S A JOURNEY" – ARTHUR ASHE

