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Thank You For Flying with CFPS!

by Dr Low Sher Guan Luke, FCFP(S), Editor

12 July 2014 – Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Welcome on board flight CFPS. This is your Captain speaking and I have some information about our flight. Our flight time will be 1 year 4 months, and our estimated date of arrival in MMed(FM)-land is 28 November 2015. The weather in our route is unpredictable, but the forecast says it will be sunny in MMed(FM)-land when we arrive, so let's look forward to that. We remind you that if you need any special attention, all our tutors will be ready to assist you. In-flight alcoholic beverages are not encouraged as you need a clear mind and strong heart during this flight. Enjoy!

7 November 2015 – Ladies and gentlemen, keep your seat-belts fastened! We are flying through a turbulent area. Thank you!

28 November 2015 – Ladies and gentlemen, we have already started our descent procedure into MMed(FM)-land airport. We expect to land at 6pm. We wish you a pleasant stay in MMed(FM)-land and we hope to see you again very soon, flying into fellowship-land. On behalf of all our crew, thank you for choosing CFPS as your airline. Thank you and have a pleasant holiday!

At the mention of holidays, the picturesque images of the destinations will spring into mind. What gets us busy subsequently will be the planning of itineraries that stretches from arrival to departure. However, few will ponder over the flight plan, or even the things that can go wrong mid-flight. We often feel that is the job of the pilot, and we just need to enjoy ourselves upon arriving at the holiday destination. Unfortunately, exams are not quite like taking holidays. The trainees are not passengers who will be brought to the destination. In fact, the trainees are the pilots of their planes. To enjoy a holiday at the destination, we must fly there safely to begin with. Over the previous batches of trainees, I have come to realize that some are really not mentally prepared. They think about how good it will be after passing exams, to have qualifications under the belt, to be the registrar or consultant of the ward or clinic. They did not bother to think of the process of getting there, the pain that will be inflicted, the sacrifices that need to be made, the sweat, blood and toil that will be required.

Being one of the tutors, we have had our fair share of trainees relating their struggles of time management to us, and how little time they have each day to do their write-ups, studies and exam preparation. Many of them wear multiple hats ranging from being doctors in their workplace, employers to many staff and subordinates, filial children to their parents, loving partners to their spouses, nurturing parents to their children, and

sometimes committee members or leaders in some organizations. There is certainly no argument on how thinly stretched we are and how much multi-tasking is expected of us. To add on the burden of exams and training, seems to be unthinkable. Yet many trainees still choose to take the hard path, to go beyond human limits. It will take the most committed of trainees to follow through the training all the way to the end and to pass the exams. Of course, we can argue that starting the training but not passing is certainly better than not starting out on any training at all! Nonetheless, once we have started on a race, there is a certain obligation to finish it, and finish it well. A lot of time, effort and grooming may be invested in the trainees by their sponsoring institutions, much as the trainees sometimes fail to recognize what is at stake and the consequences of a disappointing fail.

As I have told some trainees, I am not sure if I am allowed to add more hours to the 24 per day that we already have. But we can certainly "steal" time. It is really a productivity issue. When we took the Hippocrates oath, we swore to be good doctors to our patients. This should hold true during the hours that we spend in the clinic or hospital. At work, we need to be focused on work, and not much on family matters or even... where to go for dinner, or what to do after work. Productivity at work matters, failing which we end up with having to bring work home. Many also look at me in disbelief when I tell them how I wake up at 5am daily, leave house at 5.30am and reach workplace at 6am to "start" the day, even earlier than the house officer. Most people still do not believe that I do that, though my immediate neighbours near my table will bear witness in my favor. Of course the work with patients never start that early, but the quiet and undivided time I have between 6-8am allows me to focus on studies and exam preparations, and amazingly a lot can be done during those early hours! On occasional days after I am done with the clinic or hospital work, staying back for an hour after work will allow me to steal more time to get my studies done. All in all, stealing 3 hours a day equates to 15-21 hours per week. That's almost one whole day extra per week. I know of a few other guys who do that as well, including some heads of departments. We know this is the easiest way to steal time amidst heavy responsibilities and multiple hat wearing.

I shall now leave you with a quote from Sun Tzu - "Whoever wishes to fight must first count the cost". Be convinced in yourself that the cause is worth fighting for and the cost is worth bearing, before fighting in the first place, so that you will not give up.

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