

MY MMed FAMILY MED EXPERIENCE

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'PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST'

I would like to express my gratitude to several doctors who have contributed greatly to our success in the recent exams – Dr Chan Nang Fong (my tutor) and A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, our two very dedicated and enthusiastic PPS tutors, for their support and encouragement. A big thank you too, to A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, and to assistant tutors Drs Lim KL, Henry Yeo, Shiv, Julian, Moira and Matthew.

THE TWO YEARS THAT HAVE BEEN

It was through this course that I understood the definition and true meaning of the field of Family Medicine – its breadth as well as depth. The modules encompassed the disciplines of internal medicine, paediatrics, geriatrics, psychiatry, orthopaedics, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, as well as eye and ENT. I learnt about such disparate topics as the giants (5 I's) of geriatrics, depression, abnormal vaginal bleeding, how to perform a proper examination of a knee or inguinal hernia and developmental assessment of an infant. Our regular once monthly clinical (bedside) tutorials enabled us to revise our psychomotor skills e.g. how to perform a thorough cardiovascular or neurological examination, as well as see some rare conditions e.g. cases of autism, spina bifida etc. I feel that the benefits gained from attending the 2-year MMed course is much more than can be obtained from just attending CME activities alone (even if this is on a regular basis).

THE MMed EXAMS

I found the exams exacting and demanding. Using war terminology, some of us felt like 'barely-

surviving commandos' who have been 'bruised and bloodied' in a battle. The final eight weeks preceding the exams were filled with tension and anxiety (alternating with depression). It was very 'challenging' trying to study with 3 kids (1+, 5 and 6+ years) also vying for my attention. My 5-year old son perfected the art of preventing me from studying by physically putting his head or body (by lying down supine) on my books, or just unceremoniously punching my book away. Worst of all, my migrainous headaches had a field day and struck daily with a vengeance. I had to take high dose Vioxx throughout the duration of the exams.

The psychology of doing well in the MMed Family Med exams – This is my advice to all trainees as well as GPs contemplating on embarking on the course:-

'BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND'

The endpoint that must be in all trainees' minds right from the beginning is sitting for and passing the exams. Even as I submitted my application form at the start of the course, there had been no doubt in my mind that I would sit for the exams. By doing so, trainees will 'maximize' their gains from the course, participating, listening and learning more and in so doing also enjoy it more.

'ALL THINGS ARE CREATED TWICE, FIRST IN THE MIND, THEN IN REALITY'

Trainees must first pass the exams in their mind. For example, they could visualize themselves in the exam debrief session giving a talk to encourage their junior trainees, going up the stage to receive their Masters degree scroll on convocation day, and their names appearing on the list of successful FM graduates (on the wooden board in the Graduate Family Medicine Centre).

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'THE POWER OF BELIEF'

Never underestimate the power of belief. Remember, if you believe you'll do well in the MMed FM exams, you're right. If you believe you'll fail, you're right again. Also, *write it down and make it happen!* E.g. you may want to write down in your diary (or palmtop!) – I will do well in the MMed exams, because: i) I read up consistently, ii) I am equipped with the necessary knowledge, iii) I have the capability etc.

NEVER SAY 'I DON'T KNOW' FOR 2 REASONS

Firstly, you know! Many times, we know the answers to examiners' questions but do not say the answer out due to self-doubt, lack of confidence or the mistaken belief that the examiner is looking for a difficult answer. Secondly, if you say you 'don't know', then your mind will fail to come up with the answer i.e. self-fulfilling.

LINK PLEASURE TO THE EXAMS, NOT PAIN

Change your response to the stimulus. Tell yourself "I am proud to have the opportunity to sit for the MMed challenge", and "I love/enjoy every minute of the exams!"

BE MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY FIT

Invest in regular exercise and load up on Vitamin C laden green vegetables and citrus fruits. Two 45-minute sessions of exercise twice a week is not a waste of time, compared to a 5-day bout of a bad upper respiratory infection (worse if it occurs during exam-week!). Sleep early and well during the exams. Remember that *in every student lies a potential gold medallist*, if he rests well and has a clear mind, had read up on the topics and meets fair examiners.

IF YOU FAIL TO PREPARE, THEN PREPARE TO FAIL

Organise properly the last 12 months prior to the exams. Write down in your diary (or palmtop) the dates when you should be completing your practice log, the topics you have to cover etc. Set aside some quiet time to read up e.g. an hour a week, and read up consistently, especially the module notes.

WRITING THE PRACTICE LOG

Some trainees do not sit for the exams, citing reasons of being unable to get the required 6 cases for the write-ups. To this, I would advise that 'every patient who walks into your clinic is a potential write-up case' and it is up to you to see the value in that patient. I also found that doing the practice log was actually not as difficult as I had imagined it to be – the important thing is to sit down and start doing it. Finally, I would advise 1st year trainees to sit in and listen during the sessions when A/Prof Goh goes through the 2nd year trainees cases, as this will give them ideas as to which of their own patients are suitable for writing up.

FINAL MESSAGES

I would like to add that it takes real courage to undergo the MMed revision course and sit for the final exams. All trainees who did so, regardless of their final results, are to be saluted for their courage in trying.

I encourage all GPs to go for the MMed FM course.