



living for Christ amongst colleagues

Kari Schaitel explores the day-to-day challenges

Medical students are not only our colleagues, many are also friends or housemates - and most are not Christians. We share our lives and work with them, which is both a blessing and a great opportunity, but also generates challenges. Which areas of life might cause us problems, and how might we approach these in a biblical and practical way?

the pressure cooker

When we're assigned to firms or small groups, we find ourselves spending intense and prolonged time with people who might be quite different from us. Residential placements in district hospitals can be particularly challenging, as we both live, work and socialise with whoever we're sent with; we are far away from friends, church and our normal support structures.

Our lives are opened up extensively to others during these times, which can be a great

opportunity to witness. However, this thought can cause us to put ourselves under pressure to be 'perfect Christians', 24 hours a day, for many weeks! We can feel guilty if we slip up, or miss a single opportunity to share. We need to learn that we don't have to put on an act. Our witness of being imperfect people, saved by the love and grace of a perfect God (who is gradually helping us to become more like him) is truthful, and is effective.

Spending so long with others can cause us to get 'fed up' with each other - even if we are with people we get on well with! Make sure you get some time on your own, and time with God when on intensive placements. Jesus sets us an example: he recognised when he needed to retreat to quiet places to rest and pray.¹ Praying for the people you are on placement with can really help, especially if this is shared with other Christians.

It's easy to feel isolated when away on placements, or during particularly busy periods



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of work. Do all you can to stay connected with other Christians – meet up when you can, prioritise getting to church each week, and if you're stuck miles away, pick up the phone. Find other Christians with whom you can talk openly about spiritual matters: people who will notice when you're away and check up on you! Church small groups and prayer partners can be great at providing this support. God is the ultimate source of strength, but he tells us to form church communities for a reason!

competitiveness and boasting

It's right to want to aim for excellence in what we do, and some level of competition can be healthy. But it can be easy to get sucked into a culture where the aim is to get 'one-up' on those around us. There is a temptation to exaggerate our own abilities and experience when talking to other students, and to pull others down. During small group teaching, we can find ourselves competing to come across as the best, or we can find ourselves frustrated at others who do this.

It might help to recognise that when we or others act in this way, it is often coming out of feelings of insecurity. Other than exams, our main reference point on how we're doing is through comparison with other students, which is why it's tempting to try to convince both ourselves and others that we're better than them.

The Bible is clear in its teaching on boasting – 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord'.²

We have the awesome privilege of security – knowing that we are loved, accepted, and held in safety by a perfect and all powerful God who calls himself our Father. However, those around

us who don't know him don't have this security. We live in a society that's quick to criticise, and often slow to encourage. Can we learn to be people who encourage others? People who regularly affirm, compliment and build others up in their work, both spontaneously, and when we sense others seeking affirmation?

If you are struggling with temptation to boast, or are feeling inadequate, it can help to spend some time restoring your understanding of your identity in Christ, and the security that brings. If you find yourself frustrated with a person who seems to be tearing you down, the Bible's instructions are clear: 'bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you'.³

competition for experience

There are times when there is direct conflict between our own interests and those of other students, because we are competing for finite opportunities – when only one student can attend the clinic, put in the cannula, or take the last copy of the book out of the library. Usually it's possible to compromise and settle things peacefully, but sometimes it can feel that others aren't playing fair – especially where sign off sheets are involved! How should we respond?

Jesus' teaching and life shows us that we're called to love others as ourselves, and give of ourselves, even to the point of allowing ourselves to be wronged!

*If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*⁴

Our response to being wrongly treated should run counter to the 'fight for your rights'

culture that surrounds us. When it seems right to challenge others we should do so peacefully, making sure that we are able to do this with love, not out of anger or sense of entitlement. We should learn to recognise when it is right to let go, being prepared to hold onto things loosely, because they all pale into insignificance when compared to what we have in Christ. The way we act should demonstrate that nothing is anywhere near as important to us as knowing Jesus.

Jesus perfectly modelled self-sacrificial living, by pouring out his life for others, both during his ministry (where we see him giving up all comforts to serve others), and in his willingness to give up even his life. He didn't protest during his own unjust trial.

So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.⁵

This does not mean that we should give away every opportunity, as we also have a duty to become competent doctors, which requires us to gain experience. Therefore we need to ask God for wisdom for each situation; when to surrender our rights for the benefit of others, and when to stand our ground.

challenges to our integrity

It can be difficult if others ask us to cover up for them because they're planning on skipping teaching sessions. We've probably all been asked 'will you sign me in?' or 'will you tell the consultant I'm...?' We can feel torn: part of us wants to be loyal to our friends, to please people and not be seen as an uncaring goody-two-shoes; but we also know that as Christians, we're called to be people of integrity.

The man of integrity walks securely, but he

who takes crooked paths will be found out.⁶

Explaining to the person who asks why you're not willing to cover for them can be an opportunity to witness - although it is a fine balance, because we can just come across as 'holier-than-thou'. We need to be sensitive in how we explain ourselves. The Bible doesn't promise us that it will be easy - 'Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity and seek to kill the upright'.⁷

looking to the future

Deciding where we stand now is important. In the future, particularly when we are doctors, it is possible that we could be asked to cover for people in situations where the stakes are much higher. By setting a precedent now on the small things, others will soon learn where we stand. Not only are we less likely to be asked by others to collude in potentially compromising situations, we are more likely to make right choices when the heat is on. As Christian medics, let us aim to be beyond reproach, acting with integrity in every area of our lives.

Sharing our lives and work so closely with other students is one of the great joys of being at medical school - but it also brings challenges. As we seek to live lives that glorify God, and as we bear witness to those around us who don't know him, we need increasingly to learn to seek his strength and wisdom. Let's aim to become more like Jesus: people who show love for others, build others up, walk in integrity, but who also know how to care for ourselves - when to seek rest, support, and when to seek God. ■

REFERENCES

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|---|--|---|----------------|
| 1 | Luke 5:16 | 4 | Luke 6:29-31 |
| 2 | 2 Corinthians 10:17, quoting Jeremiah 9:24 | 5 | Mark 15:4-5 |
| 3 | Luke 6:28 | 6 | Proverbs 10:9 |
| | | 7 | Proverbs 29:10 |