

how to survive as a clinical student

Laura Quinton offers some practical hints

There are times in life when we need to put theory into practice, where 'the rubber hits the road'. For a medical student on the brink of clinical placements this is such a time. Many, like me, may feel a nervous excitement. Being a clinical medical student is very different from the life of a preclinical student. It is wise to consider what will be required to live for Christ on the wards and use the gifts he has given you before you are actually let loose! I offer some pointers to help you not just survive, but enjoy and excel in your clinical years.

Clinical studies may be your first glimpse of what the life of a hospital doctor is like. Many of your expectations and beliefs about clinical life will no doubt be confirmed, but be prepared for more than a few surprises! Spending time on the wards, in clinic and teaching sessions with doctors and other health care professionals is the mainstay of life as a clinical medical student (not forgetting the numerous interspersed coffee breaks!).

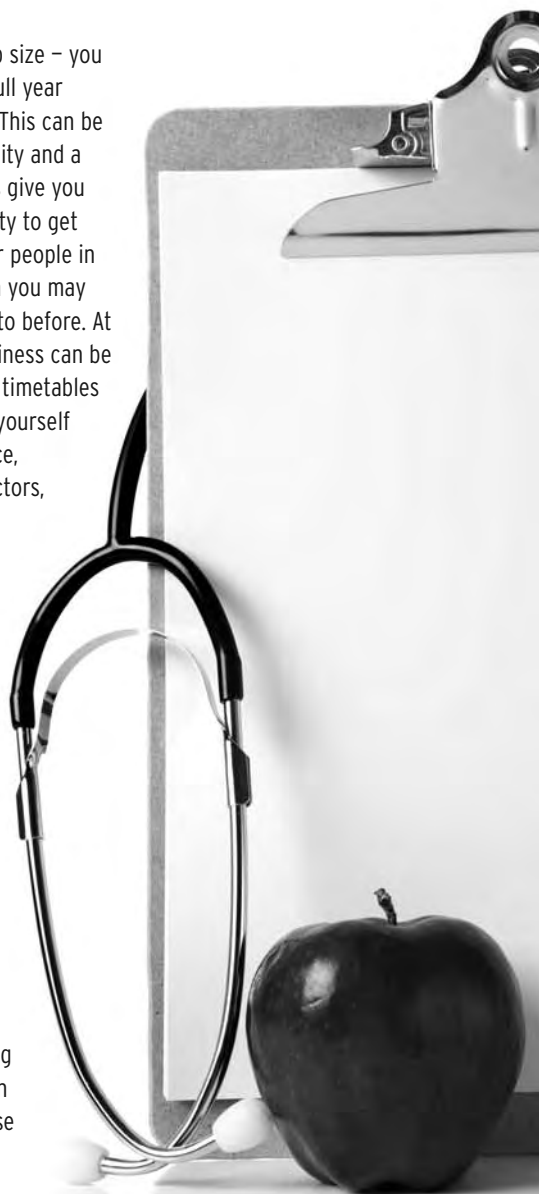
One of the major differences encountered on placement is

the smaller group size – you will not see the full year group every day. This can be both an opportunity and a challenge. It does give you a good opportunity to get to know the other people in your group whom you may not have spoken to before. At other times loneliness can be an issue as often timetables involve being by yourself in a different place, with different doctors, every day.

how to prepare

organisation

Obtain a diary or organiser if you do not already have one. With a constantly changing timetable, sometimes with random teaching and clinics interspersed during the week, this is an invaluable purchase to keep you sane and on the right track. It is also a good plan to write in your diary when you are going to do self-directed





learning and student selected components so that you are not working through the night just before the hand-in day. Get the contact details for other people in your group on the first day of placement. This means that it is easy to find out from them what you are meant to be doing if you are unsure, or if you need to pass a message on to the whole group from your consultant (who might assume that you all know each other really well).

know your goals

At the beginning of the placement you should have an induction or explanation of how the firm works, what you should be doing, and who everyone is. This does not always happen! Find out exactly what you need to have done by the end of the placement. Knowing what is expected and how you will be assessed is very important and means that there are no unpleasant surprises further down the line. Make sure you have determined what you personally want to get out of the placement, for example, becoming better at taking histories or becoming more confident at skills like phlebotomy or venous cannulation. Once determined, think about how you can achieve these goals and then go for it!

don't be afraid to ask

Most placements will be in hospitals where staff are used to students being around on the wards. Most are very willing to help, and you should never be afraid to ask a question. Foundation year 1 doctors can be especially helpful because they have just finished the process of being a medical student and have a good idea of what sort of standard you should be at. If they graduated from your medical school you have even more in common and they may be a very useful allies on the wards - do ask them for any tips they have. Nurses are also often happy to help with any of their skills that you need to learn - but may be very busy themselves at times, and have their own students to train.

'know what is expected of you and avoid surprises'

be enthusiastic

This is not always easy. However, it is true that the more you put into something, the more you will get out of it. If you consistently turn up to your placement, look interested and are willing to do things asked of you, you are more

likely to be able to watch or perform procedures. This increases both your skills and your confidence, for which you will thank yourself in the long run.

'make sure your entire life doesn't revolve around medicine'

know where to get help

Make sure you know before you start who to talk to at the medical school should anything go wrong with a placement. If personal issues arise that may affect your studies it is important to seek help sooner rather than later as much more can be done to help you at an earlier stage.

keep a balanced life

Make sure your entire life does not revolve around medicine. Though it is important to have close medic friends for companionship and camaraderie, having friends who are not medics is vital as they keep you in the real world and make your life more rounded and whole. During exam periods make sure that you make time to see these non-medic friends and enjoy a space where no-one

but yourself understands what OSCE or MTAS stand for. They may also be good people on whom to practise medical examinations as they will not pre-empt your next move, making them more realistic patient substitutes!

how can I be a good Christian medical student?

worship in all you do

Remember that everything we do should be worship to God,¹ using the gifts he has given us to bring him glory. When you remember this your perspective really changes. I find that it can be so easy, especially during exam time, to focus upon myself and my own abilities. This is where it is important to remember that you are taking these exams as a way of glorifying God. It is not about proving yourself, but rather about using gifts that God has given to you.

remember God's provision

One of the names used to describe God in the Bible is 'Jehovah Jireh' which is translated as 'the Lord will provide'.² In the gospels Jesus emphasises that our heavenly Father will provide for our needs.³ These needs are not

just material but also relational. The Lord gives us people to form close relationships with, to help and mentor us and to give us encouragement. We must remember to trust in his provision knowing that he helps us whenever it is needed.

One of the main ways I have experienced God's provision is by receiving peace from him during exam periods. We must be encouraged by God's promise that we will never be given more than we can cope with. We need to pray for his strength and help, knowing he is faithful to answer.

made in God's image

We must remember that everyone is made in God's image, created and loved by him.⁴ Every patient who comes through the doors of the hospital or GP surgery is in some ways a picture of God. It is all too easy to forget this, even though we have the privilege of learning how to treat their body. There will always be patients on a ward who you wish were not there because they are drunk or abusive or unhelpful. However, remembering that they are made in the image of God reminds you to treat them to his standards, regardless of

their behaviour towards you. Let us rejoice that God does not treat us as our behaviour demands and attempt to follow his example of unconditional love and care. Jesus taught that whenever we help somebody in need, we are serving him.⁵ Working in a hospital gives a chance to live this out every day, and experience God giving you his heart of love for the patients you come into contact with.

*'time with God
needs to be
a priority'*

make church a priority

Throughout your clinical years make sure you are involved in a church, as well as any local CMF group. This is fundamental for growing as a Christian and for personal and pastoral support. Attending church should be a high priority throughout the year. Joining a small group helps to keep you involved, and provides you with people to support you and to anchor you into the church. But just like medicine, church can take over your life. It's good to serve in church, but if you are doing worship one week followed by children's work the next, and

doing youth every Wednesday as well as attending a small group, it is easy to neglect your studies, and paradoxically not spend enough time with your creator. Although medicine should not take up your whole life, some input of time is needed. Learning to say no is an important skill for both medical and church life.

spend time with God

Having regular quiet times is something a lot of people struggle with, and being a clinical student can make it even harder. Routines are more difficult as you can have a busy timetable which is constantly changing.

However, time with God needs to be a priority; he is the reason we live, the reason we are here and the reason we are doing medicine, and if we are going to live for him we need to be spending time with him. Either leave time in the morning or make sure that you have time when you get home. There may also be time in a break during the day where you can find a quiet spot in the hospital to spend time with God.

Use situations you have come across during the day to prompt you in your prayer. Pray for the

patients you have seen in clinic or on the ward round that day or week, and pray for the other students you are on placement with.

be an ambassador for Christ

Paul talks about us being Christ's ambassadors⁶ which means that we have been chosen to represent God to everyone we meet. We are sent into the hospital as representatives of God, so must act in a way that pleases him. Be someone who shows a glimpse of what God's love is like, who stands out from the crowd, who has integrity in all they do.

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REFERENCES

1. Romans 12:1
2. Genesis 22:14
3. Matthew 6:25-34
4. Genesis 1:26-28
5. Matthew 25:40
6. 2 Corinthians 5:20