

Distinctives: five tips

Morenike Dasilva offers five tips for new students



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Congratulations on making it through your first term. I hope you have had a lovely Christmas!

The unique challenges of being a Christian medic may take time to adjust to. Here are some practical tips to help you deal with them, which I hope support and guide you throughout the rest of the year.

TIP 1: Be confident that God foresaw you would be on this course

'Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.' (Proverbs 19:21)

Medicine is competitive and you may be wondering why you were chosen over other students with similar qualifications. We can be guilty of comparing ourselves to other students and feeling as though we were accepted 'by mistake'. These feelings are known as 'imposter syndrome', a phenomenon described by psychologists Suzanne Imes and Pauline Clance.¹ It is common amongst high achievers such as university students, and symptoms include 'feelings of self-doubt, of not truly having earned your place' and 'of being the least able person in a room of geniuses'.² It is important to remember that the

course you are on and the university you are at is not a surprise to God. Trust and take comfort in the fact that God foreknew that you would be at your medical school.³

TIP 2: Know that your value comes from being a child of God and not your academic performance

'For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.' (1 Peter 1:18-19)

If silver and gold can't redeem you, neither can good grades. There is nothing wrong with working hard and setting goals, but it is important to remember that God's love for you does not change when you achieve less than you hoped for. During these challenging moments at university, remember that God present to comfort you: *'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'* (Matthew 11:28-30)

TIP 3: Find a church early on and build your support system

'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

(Matthew 6:33)

'And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' (Hebrews 10:24-25)

If you have moved away from home for university, finding a regular church to attend should be a priority. You should choose a church that is biblically focused and encourages you to be like Christ. It is also beneficial if the church hosts events that you can invite your friends to. Belonging to a church is also helpful for building a community at university and making Christian friends for mutual support and accountability. Medicine is stressful! Further guidance on choosing a church can be found in the Freshers' Edition of *Nucleus*.⁴

TIP 4: Prepare to stand out and defend your faith

'But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.'

(1 Peter 3:15)

In an increasingly secular world, you will almost certainly feel like an outsider at some point. Feeling uncomfortable during a game of 'never have I ever...' during Freshers' Week is a common experience for Christian students. Other students will be curious about what you believe, and some will even challenge your faith. You'll also need to apply your faith to medical ethical issues. Whilst this can be nerve-wracking, memorising a concise explanation of the gospel and researching the biblical perspective on these issues can help prepare you for these situations. A range of resources exploring issues related to medicine can be found on the CMF website.⁵ There is an easy to

remember gospel outline,⁶ as well as *CMF Files* which offer more detail on a wide variety of ethical topics from contraception to climate change.

TIP 5: Make time for rest and things that you enjoy

'By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.' (Genesis 2:2-3)

With medical school comes a seemingly infinite list of things to learn and it can feel like you're 'too busy' to get involved in societies and to take a break. However, the reality is that God, who foresaw you would be a medical student, values rest! Rest is vital for maintaining your mental and physical health. Research by Boni et al revealed that a routine of exhaustive study was associated with burnout amongst medical students.⁷ Also, internationally, a third of medical students experience depression.⁸ Be intentional about making time for rest and the things you enjoy; otherwise they'll be neglected and burnout may ensue. ■

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