

# Future Excellence: International Medical Summer School

## TESTIMONIAL FROM INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL SUMMER SCHOOL 2009

When I first read about the “**International Medical Summer School**” last year, I was intrigued by its novelty and uniqueness. I’ve always had my heart set on a career in surgery, but to be candid, I didn’t have a clue what this decision actually meant in terms of my future. In retrospect, it seems quite outlandish that I had made such an audacious choice with no real knowledge about how I was going to get there or what awaits me.

Recent changes to speciality training within the NHS mean that we medical students have to choose our career pathways within a year or two of qualifying. Exposure in medical school to different specialities, particularly to super-specialities such as ENT, plastic, neuro and cardiothoracic surgery, is limited and so the principal aim of the summer school is to provide students with an overview of medical and surgical specialities as well as greater understanding of a chosen speciality. The advice and guidance is provided by consultants who are on the top of their fields and the school delivers crucial information to start developing a strong, tailored portfolio. Choosing appropriate clinical placements and undertaking focused research gives a competitive edge when applying for training posts.

The first of its kind in the UK, with support, amongst others, from The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, North-West Postgraduate Deanery and Manchester University, the school ran from 17th – 21st August 2009 and was attended by students from all over the UK and countries further afield. During application, we were asked to specify whether we were interested in surgery or medicine, and then choose a sub-speciality that we would like to cover in more depth during the week. I chose General Surgery because I had always enjoyed parts of my medical course related to this area.

On the first day, we were divided into the medical and surgical groups and received a selection of inspiring talks covering an overview of the different sub-specialities within the area we'd chosen. This was great for students like myself who knew broadly that they wanted to do surgery rather than medicine, but weren't entirely sure of the sub-speciality. I'd never really thought at length what options were available to me within surgery, and so having a wide range of talks from consultant surgeons from every speciality allowed me to start to weigh up whether I could see myself taking on that particular career pathway. The talks were based on the concept of "A day in the life of", for example, "A day in the life of a cardiothoracic surgeon", and were really beneficial to me, particularly as a second year, because I had a lack of clinical experience to base any opinions off. I was rather pleasantly surprised to find myself suddenly interested in plastic surgery and neurosurgery, specialties I had never even considered before.

On the second and third days, we were split into the sub-specialties we had picked and given more in-depth knowledge about them, including current advances and the future of the sub-speciality. We were also given the opportunity to undertake basic surgical skills. I had never had the chance to learn this before, and so being shown how to tie my first surgical knot and place my first sutures was exciting to say the least. Furthermore, we were given a session using laparoscopic simulators. This gave us a shot at using laparoscopic equipment to do various tasks inside a model abdomen. It was definitely the highlight of my week! I left on the third day with my desire to do surgery reinforced more than ever.

During the evenings there were numerous social events which allowed interaction with consultants, registrars and fellow medical students in a more relaxed environment. Furthermore, we were granted mentorship from consultants, allowing us to contact them directly after the event.

I perceived the fourth and fifth days to be the most enlightening of the week. This was because key information was provided on the structure of the surgical training programmes and what needs to be accomplished in order to get onto these programmes. My initial response was complete horror at the number of things on the specifications that I had so far been totally oblivious to. Audits? I'd never heard of them. Publications? I thought these were something only incredibly knowledgeable and esteemed consultants wrote. Research? Presentations? I was astounded at the academic achievements and personal skills I was expected to demonstrate in order to have

a portfolio impressive enough to stand a chance at getting onto the training programme I wanted.

The question I then asked myself was why hadn't I found any of this out earlier? And this is what I think makes the summer school so invaluable. It was a really well organised week that provided a wealth of information and I would recommend it to any medical student, especially those who are floating along thinking that they have all the time in the world. It makes you seriously think about choosing a career pathway and gets you thinking about what sorts of things you need to do in the coming years in order to get there.

Although slightly overwhelmed at my prior lack of knowledge, I finished the week empowered and determined, and with such fierce competition for training posts I feel I've at least been given a running start. It was most certainly a week well spent!

**Ms Jemma Boyle**

Third Year Medical Student

University of Manchester Medical School

**TESTIMONIAL FROM INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL SUMMER SCHOOL 2010**

When I first started medical school I had very little knowledge of what happens after we graduate. How do I get into the speciality I want? How do I decide what career I wish to have? I thought these questions would be answered as I progressed through medical school but having spoken to many other medics at different stages of the course, it became clear that this was not the case. This was why the International Medical Summer School appealed so much to me. Organised by a large team of doctors and medical students, it aims to provide the students with the pros and cons of different specialities, teach them essential clinical skills and offer guidance on developing a balanced portfolio to help the students achieve their career aspirations.

When I arrived on the first day, I was handed a timetable for the week and was immediately impressed. I was given the choice to choose whether my week would be medicine- or surgery oriented and I was pleasantly surprised to see so many well-regarded Consultants giving the talks. These Consultants then proceeded to give a series of presentations based on 'a day in the life of...' their speciality. The sheer volume of the specialties covered was astounding and I found myself considering careers that I had never even thought about before!

Over the next two days we were split into sub-specialties that we had already chosen where we were given a number of lectures on current topics in that specialty. I was particularly surprised with how up-to-date the lectures were and how they gave me a real insight as to where the specialty was heading in the future. I was then given the opportunity to use a vast amount of equipment related to my specialty. I was able to use a laparoscopic simulator on model abdomen as well as a training programme used for foundation doctors. I felt privileged to be using such technically advanced equipment which I had never dreamed of using during medical school. In addition, basic skills such as suturing, knot tying, basic life support and trauma life support were also taught. It was this part of the conference that I enjoyed the most.

The final two days were definitely the most valuable and for me the reason why the summer school has so much appeal. These days were made up of lectures all about the different career pathways and the research to be undertaken to achieve this. Having had no previous knowledge of the need for research before qualifying as a doctor, I was intrigued to find out exactly what was needed. There was information on how to go about presenting at conferences, doing audits, how to get involved in research, and, importantly, how to get publications. I found this especially useful since, in medical school, a lot of emphasis is placed on publishing but there isn't much information on how to go about it.

As enlightening as the conference was, I was pleased to find that a number of social events were organised throughout the week for us to partake in. These events provided a relaxed atmosphere to get to know other students attending the conference as well as some of the lecturers. The Consultants and Registrars were really friendly with many providing their contact details for future research opportunities. Overall, I would say the International Medical Summer School is not one to miss as it is a unique event with a great appeal to medical students all over the world at any stage of their degree. I have gained a great level of focus towards my chosen specialty and the knowledge in order to get there.

**Mr Gursevak Singh**

Year 2 Medical Student

University of Manchester

[gursevak.singh@student.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:gursevak.singh@student.manchester.ac.uk)

**TESTIMONIAL FROM INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL SUMMER SCHOOL 2011**

I first heard about the International Medical Summer School when I saw a poster in my medical school building. This gave me a brief overview as to what I could expect from the week-long event in terms of content and also planted the idea that as it was an International event; and made me aware that it would be an excellent opportunity to meet fellow medical students from around the world – a chance that does not come along very often.

Junior doctors are now expected to choose their medical speciality pathway before they have even completed their FY2 year, less than two years after qualifying as doctors. This does not leave much time for 'trying out' the different specialities, gaining relevant experience, and fully appreciating the benefits and challenges that there may be, before having to commit to a long and often competitive training programme. The purpose of the Summer School is to therefore provide medical students with additional information and insight into the specialities on offer from junior doctors, registrars and consultants in these fields. This is invaluable experience as, without it, it is difficult to make an informed choice for what is a very important decision. I found this aspect of the Summer School to be the most exciting, as exposure to many of the medical and surgical specialities can be a little limited as an undergraduate.

Upon registration for the summer school, we were asked to state whether we are firstly interested in medicine or surgery, and then to choose a sub-specialty grouping within this. I knew that I liked the idea of working in the acute/emergency medicine arena, but had no real knowledge of what specifically this entailed or how to accomplish it. I therefore chose Medicine and the ACCS grouping (Acute Care Common Stem), which included Acute medicine, Emergency Medicine, Anaesthesia and Intensive Care. This was a difficult choice for me however, as I had not really ruled anything out at this early stage in my career – and all the groupings looked interesting!

On day 1, we were provided with an overview of Medicine covering many different sub-specialities, including talks on a day in the life of a Radiologist, Anaesthetist, Paediatrician and Psychiatrist, to name just a few. This provided us with a brief flavour of the type of work you could expect to undertake in each area and helped whet our appetite for the rest of the week to come.

On days 2 and 3, we split off into our smaller sub-specialty groupings, and were given much more detailed information regarding the ACCS training programme and how to apply, competition rates and tips for strengthening our applications. I found the talks not only very informative, but also inspirational in many ways and this confirmed to me that this was the specialty I was really interested in. We also had the opportunity to try various hands-on skills, including suturing and surgical knot-tying, insertion of a chest drain and advanced trauma life support. These sessions were absolutely brilliant and this was definitely the highlight of my week!

Days 4 and 5 focussed on publishing, research and portfolio building, and gave some specific detail regarding what assessors are looking for when considering applicants for the core medical and surgical training programmes. As a pre-clinical second year medical student, this is something I had not really considered at all – let alone started working towards prior to the Summer School, and I was a bit shocked by all the additional academic achievements we are expected to have in order to stand a chance at gaining a place. These lectures and useful tips from many highly esteemed academics and clinicians really opened my eyes to how crucial all this is, especially if you are interested in some of the more competitive specialties. More importantly however, I started to realise just how arduous and lengthy a task it can be to get a piece of work successfully through the many stages prior to being published; and therefore how easy it could be to miss out on valuable application points simply due to timings. This really struck a chord with me, and so armed with the invaluable information I gained, I have started to consider and plan my career path much more proactively.

Throughout the week we also had plenty of time to meet, work and socialise with the other delegates and I was astounded by how far many people had travelled to attend the Summer School, considering I had only travelled a relatively very short distance! This provided us with a unique opportunity to not only learn more about medicine and training around the world and compare our own system, but also encouraged networking among students and tutors to arrange mentoring, placements and projects.

I have come away from the International Medical Summer School feeling excited, inspired and much more knowledgeable about how to succeed in my future career in medicine. I understand more clearly the many obstacles that may stand in my way – but feel equipped with the tools to help me get around them. It was an invaluable experience, one that I feel I have really benefitted from and a really worthwhile week of my summer. I would definitely recommend it to any medical student!

**Ms Danielle Cowlin, BSc (Hons)**

Year 2 Medical Student

University of Manchester