

September 2016

I have just started my 3<sup>rd</sup> year of medical school at the University of Southampton.

I can't believe how quickly the past 2 years have flown by! I've had a few ups and downs during the course but overall I am so glad I chose to pursue medicine as a career. A lot has changed since I won the CJ Littlejohns prize but none of this would have happened without it. The prize allowed me to explore the topic of mental health, carry out a work experience placement in paediatrics in London and Professor Littlejohns has become almost a mentor to me throughout the application process, start of university and now, where I am almost half way to being a doctor! I just wanted to say thank you for all of your help from day 1.

This is just an update on how far I have come since winning the prize. I have really enjoyed my time at university so far and have really learnt a lot about my strengths and weaknesses and so much more. I was told by some students at open days that the hardest part of medical school was the application process and once you were in, you will sail through. This may be the case for some but I definitely struggled. From being one of the top in my year at Gowerton School and then sitting in a lecture theatre where 200+ people were also the cream of the crop. It is a huge jump, you suddenly become 'average'. Many students see medicine as a competition and they want to be at the top, others (like myself and friends) see it as a team effort. I would really recommend making friends (even in years above you) that are willing to help, share notes, answer questions and revise with you. Please don't let this put you off though, medical school is very difficult but if you work hard, you will get the results.

The past 2 years have been mainly lecture based, with some clinical contact either in a GP practice or hospital ward. I found these years very intense and struggled especially during exam time, which never happened to me in school. Trying to find a way to make concise lecture notes was possibly one of the hardest things, I tried everything! Writing by hand (but it took too long), typing on a laptop (I ended up writing too much), flashcards (couldn't fit everything on them)...Eventually I found that I loved drawing diagrams with lots of colour on big sheets of paper was my strategy, although I only found this out up until recently! Time management was my other big issue, having to balance equal time between modules, social activities, other deadlines and student life (cooking, shopping, cleaning etc).

Obviously focus on your studies but allow plenty of time for other activities and societies that may be sport, music or even cake decorating! This year, I am part of the committee of 2 societies. I am secretary of Mixed Medics Hockey which is one of the largest MEDSOC societies. We have a lot of fun playing hockey, travelling to different medical schools in the UK and even venturing further abroad on tour. For me, this was a great way to make friends. I have become really close with all different year groups, who are willing to teach topics that I struggle with, and will pass on their revision notes to me. Another society I am a part of is WAMSOC (Widening Access to Medicine). We go into schools or arrange schools to visit us and encourage state school students who may not consider medicine as a career to start to think about it. We have had workshops with year groups as young as year 6 to teach them basic clinical skills such as CPR, talking to them about their views of doctors and letting them know that we are there for help and to answer questions about university. We are also involved in older year groups where the focus is more on UCAS, interview technique, UKCAT and personal statement advice.

I am currently carrying out a research project up until Christmas in paediatrics on type 1 diabetes. This is very different to the previous years as it is more independent and clinical orientated. After Christmas, we will start our first ever proper placement! We have 3 rotations, each 8 weeks long; GP, surgery and medicine/elderly care. For this we will also be learning how to do cannulas and take blood, tackle ethical dilemmas, perfect history taking and at the end of the year, we will undertake our very first OSCEs. This is the part of medicine I have been looking forward to the most, the patient contact.

Thanks again to Professor Littlejohns, Gowerton School and everyone else who has helped me this far! Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me about the prize, university, medical school or anything else. Good luck!