

Think back, Stop thinking, Think Ahead

The summer break presents an opportunity for medical students at Notre Dame to recharge and reconnect. It is a well earned luxury which allows an individual to escape the medical microcosm.

Following the final examinations, the mass of student are initially bewildered, though they rapidly disperse (following some very festive and vigorous celebration) to pay back 'time' debts. The creditors of this time are usually family and friends. Although they have not sat through countless lectures and demanding assessments they have all endured the absence of their loved one at times when their presence would have been cherished.

The importance of taking time out is often understated. A period of time away can serve to facilitate not only relaxation but reflection on learning, experiences and events. The relaxation component will clear the mind, revitalise the ability to learn and enable an individual to operate more efficiently. The opportunity to reflect on the time spent learning or in the workplace nurtures an attitude of accountability. A habit that if developed early enough can serve multiple ends during a medical career.

With all that said, it is obvious to most that this time of year is probably least conducive to relaxation and reflection. Once you are finished reconnecting with family/friends and reflecting on triumphs and tragedies through 2007, thoughts must turn to the challenges ahead. Not the least of which will be losing the Christmas belly tyre.

Personally I have found the 40 week challenge that was first year at Notre Dame extremely trying. At times, life balance did not exist. Family and friends would fade from the foreground – seldom noticed between lectures, study and sleep (itself a precious commodity). I realise that the extent of the break between academic years is a period that will probably not be repeated in years to come – I therefore encourage all medical students to utilise these fleeting days to get reacquainted with their humanity; catch up with friends, argue with family, make up with family, go shopping, SLEEP, watch daytime television, go to the beach, read a book, anything.

Many wise practitioners have told me that a pre-planned annual leave is an essential ingredient for successful maintenance of mental health in medical practice. Wise words that should be heeded. On that note, I must visit my friend the beach.

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