

Enter the secret world of *Hogwash Hospital...*

Part 1



– A report on a student elective programme, by Nott Mi

Nott Mi is a final year student who recently ran an interview with some members of our local surgical circle. He had a rare opportunity to visit Hogwash Hospital on a student elective programme, spending four weeks there, absorbing a different work culture and environment.



Hogwash Hospital is one of the oldest hospitals in existence, but has kept a low public profile because some of their work practices got bad press in the past. So they try not to let “Muddles”, what we call “laymen”, know too much. As a local medical student who has done all my previous postings with the government hospitals, it was eye-opening indeed to see how other institutions do things.

Hogwash Hospital is run like no other hospital that I know of. The headhunter is Professor Dumb-old-bore, who loves to give senseless speeches, and goes around various government hospitals to recruit more specialists for the hospital. They boast almost all available subspecialties, but have only 200 beds. The reason for this is because they cater mostly to rich patients who value privacy above all else, and who are willing to pay what it takes to get it. However, being a partially government funded hospital, they still have to serve a small proportion of subsidised patients. Consequently, doctors who work in Hogwash Hospital share a certain mentality. The majority of them chose to work there for the money and the chance to rub shoulders with the rich and famous.

In an effort to encourage friendly competition to improve service quality, they have formed four different focus groups, known as Give-It-All, Rave-N-Claw, Huff-N-Puff and Slide-N-Win. These focus groups meet once a month to exchange ideas on how to run their various services and units, according to their ideals. Membership into each of the groups is compulsory, and each batch of new medical officers (MO) gets scrutinised by current members and their names are put up for consideration.

Housemen are quiet little things who run around and get everything done, usually staying out of sight so as not to draw unwanted attention to themselves. They are trained to be submissive and not complain, because if they get blacklisted, any chance of getting into their desired focus group when they turn MO is lost. The mark of a good Houseman is neither to be seen nor heard.

Each of the four focus groups has very different aims, goals and beliefs in aspects of patient management.

Give-It-All members tend to be very *gung-ho* people, willing to risk everything for what they perceive is a worthy end-point. Most of the members are surgeons and intensivists; certain

Dr Tan has been counselled extensively at various stages of her budding surgical career regarding her chosen path. She has thus far remained true to her calling. However, having not held a scalpel for six months, and doing nothing more challenging than writing mortality reports for patients who passed away after spending three months in hospital, she is close to despair. It is interesting to note that she has suffered more papercuts in these six months than needlestick injuries in the past six postings. Struggling to study for examinations has not helped in cheering her up. She is this close to cutting her own throat in a desperate effort to do a tracheostomy.

◀ Page 20 – Enter the Secret World of Hogwash Hospital... (Part I) oncologists and several interventional radiologists are prominent in this focus group. Givers are big-hearted, and live for their patients, sacrificing personal time for them. However, they may come across as arrogant because they have this air of superiority that they can *and* have done more than anyone else could. This irritates the other focus groups to no end.

Rave-And-Claw, despite the rather aggressive sounding name, is actually a quiet and intellectual group of people. Many research scientists join this group, where they can carry out high-level discussions. The only clawing done is clawing of their own hair when they fail to secure a research grant. Ravers may come from any discipline, but all of them have published papers in leading journals, and naturally think themselves cleverer than anyone else. This is very true when it comes to research, but when it comes to actually getting things done, Huffers are the best.

Huff-N-Puff members are good solid folks, toiling away quietly for the common good. The contributions from this focus group are often understated. Huffers comprised mainly of pathologists, internists and radiologists. They like to keep a low profile, providing the essential backbone upon which Hogwash Hospital can function. Unfortunately, being so quiet and unassuming, they tend to get overlooked when it comes to good service recognition. Most of them do not mind, but some are naturally resentful of the loudmouths in Give-It-All, the smart-alecks in Rave-And-Claw and the slimy suck-ups in Slide-N-Win.

Slide-N-Win is a very mixed group, with the one identifying trait being overwhelming ambition. Their subspecialty may be anything; they tend to be among the best in their chosen field, and all of them have ambitions to go higher. It makes others uncomfortable when they realise that Sliders will stop at nothing to get what they want. Sliders believe that Hogwash Hospital should be exclusive only to private patients and some refuse to see subsidised patients. One of their favourite veiled insults is "TCU Dr MO" when it comes to subsidised patients.

To the Givers, this is an unforgivable comment because they believe that all patients should be treated equally, and no attention should be paid to class status. Sliders think that this is stupid because there are so many other doctors out there who can provide the same service. Subsidised patients can go see them. Sliders firmly believe that time is money and their time belongs only to those who can pay for it.

All these ideas are not that new to me but never have I ever seen them crystallised so clearly, and with such strong proponents. Wanting to learn more about how junior doctors feel about it, I ventured to speak to Lobbo, one of their Housemen:

"Hi Lobbo, I'm Nott Mi, a medical student. Please, take a seat!" To my surprise, he burst into tears!

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you or anything."

"Offend Lobbo!" chocked the Houseman, "Lobbo has *never* been asked to sit down by a doctor, like an *equal*."

"I'm just a student... not a doctor yet! You can't have met many decent doctors," I said, trying to cheer him up. To my horror, he started to strangle himself with his stethoscope!

"Stop! What are you doing?!"

"*Bad Lobbo! Bad Lobbo!* Lobbo must not speak ill of his consultants! Lobbo is always having to punish himself for something..."

"If working here is so bad, why not leave? Change hospital?"

"Housemen here signed a special contract. If I break the bond with Hogwash Hospital, I will be blacklisted and will *never* get a single private patient in my whole working life!"

"Oh dear... but is the price worth it? Look at Dr Buay Zai See. He wasn't happy where he was so he just upped and left!"

"Ah... if he only knew!" Lobbo groaned, tears dripping into his worn-out *baju*. "If he knew what he means to us, the lowly, the enslaved, we dregs of the medical world!"

"You poor things. I'm worried now. I hope my housemanship will be better than what you are going through."

"Since Dr Buay spoke up for those of us who are overworked and underpaid, it has been like a new dawn, and life is improving for Housemen everywhere! It's only here that... *Bad Lobbo! Bad Lobbo!*" I had to restrain him before he shoves an NG tube down himself.

After much reassurance that I will not tell any of his consultants about his unhappiness, he slunk away to finish his changes before "Dementors" can find him. Dementors are senior consultants who swoop down on unwary junior doctors and suck away their free time by arrowing them to do menial useless scut work. This first encounter with Lobbo has not been very encouraging. I am determined to speak to more doctors, both junior and senior staff to get a better feel of what working life is like in this unique hospital.

To be continued... ■