



Guide to Specialisation

First – a word from our sponsors – the government. It is no secret that this column on specialisation is sponsored by the government in another attempt to boost our waning fertility rates. Actually, our fertility rates are not just waning but deader than Elvis, Mummy 4 and David Beckham’s football career put together. So we need to give serious and accurate advice to our young budding doctors on the issues surrounding specialisation.

The first thing you gotta realise is that specialisation is BAD for fertility, obstetricians included. But first, let us take a step backwards – specialisation is BAD for sex, which in most instances, is a necessary precondition for pregnancy which in turn leads to fertility. (Note: This does not apply to teenage school girls accompanied by their mothers or foreign domestic helpers, who see you for missed periods and/or nausea, in which case, pregnancy happens spontaneously like flatus and boogies.)

Having said that, we also note that the reverse is true: fertility is bad for specialisation especially when applied to female doctors. Namely because your traineeship posting will NOT be counted and you will be treated with utter contempt by your supervisors and fellow colleagues. Can you imagine the amount of ridicule, sniggers and behind-your-back cursing when you go on FOUR MONTHS of maternity leave? I mean seriously folks, who is going to do your &^%\$#@! calls for 4 whole months? You jolly well know that the only time they’ll let you off when you are pregnant is when you also have a death in your immediate family or when you are about to deliver (supper for the on-call team).

But if you think that being a specialist means more to you than the presidency means to Hillary Clinton, then by all means specialise. This is where

you have to make an important life-changing decision. You get to choose to apply to be a trainee in a specialty. There are a few options:

- Specialise in Money
- Specialise in Family
- Specialise in the Furtherance of Scientific Knowledge
- And if you come from a certain neighbouring country, you can also specialise in physical examinations to discover previous sodomies. Apparently, such medical talents are in great demand there.

If you choose to specialise in money, the choices are clear. You should aspire to be a politician or a plastic surgeon. Failing which, you can be an aesthetic physician or an oncologist. Ophthalmology is passé with the crash of the Lasik market. The party is also over for transplant surgeons.

Whatever you do, do NOT talk to your seniors before you make a decision. This is to ensure that you get balanced, non-cynical information from intelligent and sane individuals. Instead, you should watch well-researched TV shows like *House* and *Grey’s Anatomy*. You may actually think you will have a fulfilling and materially rewarding life in medicine by being head of diagnostic medicine.

And if you decide to specialise in family, you can consider joining the Ministry of Health or its statutory boards. These places are usually run by non-doctors who have a life and understand the complex concept of office hours. That is, if you consider attending meetings, writing bland correspondence and attending “work-life balance family day outings” a life.

And if you do think you want to decide on devoting your life to research and the furtherance of scientific knowledge, I have no advice for you. People

who want to work long hours and get paid a pittance do not need advice – they need psychiatric help fast.

But remember this, on no account should you choose to apply for the disciplines of general medicine or general surgery. These belong to the mythological realm of unicorns, phoenixes and Britney Spears comebacks.

Once you have decided on what to specialise in and apply for specialisation, you will then have to make the second most important decision in your path to being a specialist – ***what on earth do you wear for the traineeship interview?***

For guys, the choice is simple – wear clean socks and undergarments and try not to smell. Also, please remember to shave. (Note: This may apply to some female candidates too.) Wearing a tie is essential, if nothing else but to prove to the interviewers that you accord them great respect despite obviously knowing that the latest research shows that ties are a source of all the vilest germs. And do try to wear a silk tie with absolutely boring motifs and colours. This will reassure them that should you become a member of their esteemed specialty one day, you will not disgrace them by wearing a stupid, flashy polyester tie (paediatricians excluded). Finally, comb your hair, but try not to emulate Kim Jong-Il too much.

Women are kind of in a fix. There are case reports of lady doctors going to Bhutan for 2 weeks to meditate on just what to wear for the traineeship interview. Of course, some have easier decisions to make – if the panel is all-men, look feminine; and if there are female(s) on the panel, wear something from OG. When in doubt, dress like a lawyer, because that usually does the trick. As for hairdos, the same Kim Jong-Il rule applies to females as well.

But should you have lousy fashion sense and less than great grades, you need to work harder as you prepare for the interview. First, you need to know who is on the panel. And you need to be bloody on the ball when you appear in front of them, which you should do so frequently, other than at funerals and in the same toilet cubicle. You need to catch their attention by being hardworking, bright and eager. In other words, you really, and I really mean really, suck up to them and their frail egos. In other words, behave like some pandering drug rep.

If you know the right people, look right and hopefully smell right, the last thing you need to do is sound right during the interview – do not burp or fart. Of course, do try to give the right answers. You must realise by now that the panel consists of people who have devoted most of their working life to public healthcare and the poor

patient. In other words, they are probably not too smart. That gives you a slight advantage. Also realise that they are bored because they have been doing this for years and despite what they do, they know you, like all those they have selected before, will disappoint them.

Some of the common questions they may ask are:

a) *What research paper have you read recently that interests you?*

You must give an answer that has snob appeal. That would straightaway exclude local publications, unless you can quote a paper written by an interview panelist, in which case you get his vote but may piss off his enemy seated two places away from him.

b) *Why do you want to choose this specialty?*

You should start with a broad answer – if you are going for a surgical discipline, state why internal medicine sucks and vice versa for medical disciplines. Then narrow down to your chosen discipline. Example: “I like cardiology because I think it is a very elegant discipline.” (Note: “Elegant” works for almost any specialty except forensic medicine, palliative medicine, etc.) If you want to choose a non-patient-facing discipline, then talk about the intellectual satisfaction of being a pathologist/radiologist/etc. On no account must you tell the truth – which is you hate the human race.

c) *What sub-specialisation are you considering?*

This is an easy question in which you should answer by saying you want to choose the toughest, poorest-paying sub-specialisation. Examples: ENT – head and neck surgery; eye – paediatric ophthalmology; oncology – palliative care; orthopaedics – trauma; cardiology – heart failure; etc etc. OK, you get the picture.

d) *What are your hobbies and what do you do in your free time?*

Even if you are absolutely boring, you must say something safe yet interesting at this juncture. This will ensure that you will be remembered as more than a face. Examples of interesting hobbies would include attending opposition rallies, marathon running and other suicidal pursuits. And despite what you think, reading *Harrison's* daily is NOT a hobby.

And should you be fortunate enough to be accepted as a trainee, remember, your first duty is to your country. Therefore, please socialise and fertilise while you specialise... ■

(Editor's Note: The government should consider including The Hobbit in next year's National Day Awards.)