

# MYTHICAL FEEDBACK

Just when you thought September was going to be a quieter month than the breathless month of August (what with the festivities of YOG and National Day), September also threw up its share of interesting incidents. First, important pronouncements were made on the very important subject of education. No, we are not talking about the announcement of the setting up of the third medical school. Let's face it, after the second one in a 100 years, the third, fourth or nth one doesn't quite make news anymore. We are of course talking about the momentous fact that a junior college will be set up for Catholic High, St Nicholas and SCGS students. Think of the possibilities with such a combination when it comes to designing the school uniform. It's almost as mind-boggling as designing our residency programme.

Speaking of residency, we have received via various dark magicks some feedback about this complicated stuff. The Hobbit hastens to add that the following feedback does not constitute "very legitimate grouses" or actions that can be interpreted that someone wants to "complain to the highest authorities about the brusque handling and policy U-turns".<sup>1</sup> This is because if it were, the Hobbit is sure:

a) No "highest authorities" read what the Hobbit has to say. If any highest authority ever did, he doesn't deserve his highest authority salary. He should spend more time conducting surveys that show the residency is loved by everyone and everything, from the Emeritus Professor to something inanimate like the clinical department Xerox machine;

b) There are no real grouses whatsoever. These grouses are mythical at best and need no refuting. If they were suspected to be real, the Hobbit is sure some highest authority will conduct a survey to show that there are no real grouses – as was the case with the proposed amendments to the Medical Registration Act (MRA) last year;

c) We can, as a last resort, again learn from the amendments to the MRA. We can call in the senior lawyers to fix our residency system. And then we can also conduct a survey to show why lawyers are needed to fix our residency system.

The Hobbit is also sure that Liverpool will also win the premier league this year. Anyway, here is some mythical feedback we have been talking about earlier on:

Dear Ring Bearer

### Hero to Zero

Earlier on, medical officers who graduated before 2010 were told they could still apply for the BST/AST training route while those who graduated in 2010 could apply for the residency programmes when they became available. This is true. Except that chances are not very good for those currently in the BST/AST route. Take a look at the statistics for some of the larger specialties.

|                     | No. of successful applicants<br>- May 2010 Basic and<br>Seamless Traineeship Results <sup>2</sup> | No. of successful applicants<br>- Nov 2010 Basic and<br>Seamless Traineeship Results <sup>2</sup> |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Anaesthesiology     | 15  | 3   |
| Radiology           | 29  | 2   |
| General Surgery     | 39  | 0   |
| Internal Medicine   | 64  | 10  |
| Orthopaedic Surgery | 13  | 0   |

I am a national service MO and I want to be an orthopaedic surgeon so that I can have access to great power. I was on the Dean's List for three years and I have two medals. But if I now apply to be a resident, I will be junior to my juniors who already have become residents. How can major specialties like General Surgery or Orthopaedic Surgery not award any traineeship? Is there going to be a bumper crop of residency places going out next year for these two disciplines?

Yours truly  
Dr Ahmad Bin Samad  
Kosong, Kampong Orang Latihan  
Singapore 168851

### Hobbit's reply

Perhaps indeed we will have a bumper crop of residency places next year. As soon as we have a bumper crop of residency programme supervisors/trainers, the Hobbit is sure that will happen. If not, we can always (yes, you got it) do a survey to address this issue then.

Dear Hobbit

### No Return of Chen Zhen

I have a MRCS from UK and I am applying for a registrar position in Singapore. But I was told recently that with the residency programme, I may have to start as a resident in the second year of residency (i.e. equivalent to 1st year MO after housemanship). This is terrible. Are they not recognising my training up to MRCS?

Does that mean I have to wait until I finish my training in UK in two to three years time or go off now to somewhere else instead? I was told Canada still recognises MRCS. I thought there was a shortage of doctors in Singapore and I was keen to come back as soon as possible. Your wisdom is needed!

Yours sincerely  
Dr Chen Zhen  
MBBS, MRCS

### Hobbit's advice

Please come back! The nation needs you. Even if we don't need you as registrar, we need you to contribute to our declining birth rates. Do you realise Singapore Airlines does not even fly to Canada anymore?

Dear Squirt

### Flexible Maths

I am a resident. I am supposed to clerk a maximum of only 8 patients a day when I am on call. But in truth, I have been doing my fair share of work with the non-residents. I have been clerking easily 10 to 20 patients a day when I am on call because I don't think it is right for me to clerk only 8 while my non-resident colleagues clerk up to 20 patients when we are on call together. I think to clerk only 8 when my colleagues do much more work during calls is unjust, inequitable and bad for fostering teamwork.

However, I am told that later on, when the "auditors" come and visit us, I am supposed to say that I only clerk 8 patients a day when I am on call even though I have always clerked more than 8. I don't know who these auditors are, but I think they may be quite important. What am I supposed to say?

Yours truly  
Dr Boh Pian Lang  
Resident

### Hobbit's admonishment

Most important advice – ALWAYS tell the truth. The truth is that you clerked about 8 patients a day when you are on call. 18 is about 8, the only difference is a "1". Let's face it; if you were so good with maths, you would have been an accountant or engineer, not a doctor. If the auditors somehow bring up the point that you have gotten distinctions for maths since PSLE, tell them you have been lucky since you were 12 years old and it was all a fluke. Remember, always tell the truth. Especially when your big shots' legacies and bonuses depend on it.

Dear Ai-Chai

### I Not Foreign Talent?

I am a Hong Kong colleague of a Singaporean doctor, Chen Zhen, working in London. I have a MRCS and I attended one of those recruitment talks given by senior Singapore doctors when they were in London. They said they were short of doctors and wanted us to go to Singapore. I was very impressed and I applied for a General Surgery registrar job in Singapore. But I was told that they cannot give me a registrar job because registrar posts will be phased out soon. I have to apply to be a resident and begin training all over again under the American system. I find this strange. Anyway, I will just have to stay put in UK or return to HK.

Dr Ip Man  
MBBS, MRCS  
Leicester Square, London

### Hobbit's Comments

Don't like that leh. Even if you don't qualify to be foreign talent, you can still come to Singapore for MBS, RWS etc. As a sign of hospitality, we don't take \$100 from you when you enter the casino. Singapore is still a better place to be than in HK. For one – HK's version of wanton mee only has wanton; Singapore's wanton mee has wanton and char siew as well. Can you beat that?

Dear Short One

### Pax America

Competition is the in-thing now. The Competition Commission of Singapore (CCS) says competition is good. I agree. Everywhere we have competition in healthcare. We have competing healthcare clusters, national centres, hospitals, GP clinics, and even casket companies. We also have competition in medical schools - we have two going on to three. How come for postgraduate education we have ONE system and nothing else? ACGME-I should compete too! Who competes with ACGME-I? In mainstream education, we also have more than one system and more competition – In addition to taking the 'O' and 'A' level route, one can also take the integrated IB (International Baccalaureate) route now.

Wonder what the CCS has to say about this ACGME-I monopoly? Why can't we let a hundred flowers bloom? Don't we have a FTA (Free Trade Act) with USA since 2003 that ensures competition?

Doctors listen to evidence. We practice evidence-based medicine. We should conduct an experiment with both the BST/AST and residency system running in tandem and compare if indeed residency training is better than BST/AST. The BST/AST can serve as a control for residency in this experiment. Pronouncements that residency is better without outcome measures and controls is not evidence-based education.

Yours sincerely  
Dr Tao Hong  
Pneumocephalus Clinic

### The Hobbit

Dear Dr Tao, you are grouching and complaining and not being constructive. This is not feedback! You are being difficult, unpatriotic and "failing in your professional creed". And I need to advise you that if you attempt to influence others to see things as you do, you may be deemed to be participating in "collective action", which is a very bad thing. In addition, the Hobbit doesn't agree that you need a controlled experiment to show that residency is better. We should (yes, you get it...) do a survey to show that respondents overwhelmingly think and know that residency is better than BST/AST.

Dear Hobbit

### Britannia rules, old chum

I understand that Singapore has adopted the American system of residency shortly after Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School started operating there. Now that it has been announced that Imperial College London will set up a third medical school with NTU, will they give the same "face" to Imperial College as they did to Duke and introduce, I mean, reintroduce the British system of specialty training in Singapore? After all, you can't expect Imperial College graduates to be trained under (heaven forbid) those uncultured fellows across the Atlantic? The sun never sets on the Empire, even if you are no longer a subject.

Lord Austin Myers Powers  
British Educator in service to Her Majesty's Realm.

### Hobbit's comments

Let's make thing easy, why don't we just send Dr Evil to fix the whole training thingy? BTW, please say hi to fellow shorty Mini Me for me. Haven't seen him for some time.

<sup>1</sup> August 2010 SMA News – One People, One Nation by Dr Jeremy Lim

<sup>2</sup> Actual start of traineeship may vary from 2010 to 2012; <http://www.physician.mohh.com.sg/>; accessed 20 September 2010