



Guide to Medical School Admission Selection

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It's that time of the year again when something important happens. You can feel it in the air which is pregnant with tension. We are not talking about filing tax returns, the Hougang by-election, or even the very exciting SMA Annual General Meeting, which lasted all of 40 minutes last year.

This column, strictly speaking, is not targeted at doctors. It is targeted at folks who still have a chance to step away from the abyss, avert disaster and escape calamity. No, I am not asking you not to take the MRT. I am asking you not to become a doctor.

If you are already a doctor, well too bad. Try reincarnation.

There are basically two kinds of folks who want to be a doctor. You may think the two categories are those who succeed and those who don't. You can't be more wrong than that. The two categories are simply those who can afford an overseas medical education and those who can afford a local one at Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM), Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School or Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCSoM).

If you can afford to go overseas, you have nothing to worry about. Please stop reading and go back to playing Farmville or some mindless Facebook game.

But then again, this is Singapore, and the rich and poor have equal access to subsidised education. I once knew a doctor who bought a Porsche for himself when his son got into YLLSoM. His reasoning was that the savings from staying in Singapore could fund the purchase of the Porsche. Brilliant logic.

If you are the poor chap who happens to aspire to a doctor but can only afford YLLSoM, here are the basic criteria that may just qualify you for consideration to be considered for a flicker of a chance to be interviewed for possible consideration to be given entry to this very prestigious medical school:

1. Has IQ of 150 and above
2. Represented your country in some sport and has broken some age group national record
3. Looks better than Angelina Jolie AND Brad Pitt
4. Speaks like Obama
5. Has perfect "A" Level or International Baccalaureate scores
6. Fly a plane or a helicopter
7. Demonstrate at least one special trait or ability like telekinesis or walking on water

Please note that having all these traits ONLY gives you a chance to be perhaps interviewed by the panel of sadists at the admissions interview. Other traits you think may matter, actually do not. These include:

1. Empathy and ability to communicate with fellow human beings
2. Parent is a VVIP like Cabinet Minister or SMA President
3. Being a Raffles Institution (RI)/Raffles Junior College (RJC) student

Now, if you happen to have the traits the local medical schools want, you will next have to prepare your "portfolio". It is merely an account of the properties, stocks and bonds your family owns that will come in handy financing your education, as well as the clinic suite at Mount Elizabeth@Novena and Mount Elizabeth@Mount Elizabeth. At the rate things are going, by the time you are ready for private practice, we may well have Mount Elizabeth@Pulau Tekong.

Just kidding. The portfolio is a collection of the things you want the folks at the medical school to know about you. I once

met a female applicant who has four papers in her name, one as first author in a peer reviewed scientific journal. I am not making this up. And guess what, I was told later she did NOT make it into the medical school. That's because she couldn't summon her purported powers of clairvoyance as demanded by the interviewers. She should have seen this coming, poor girl!

The portfolio also includes a short essay about why you want to be a doctor. The typical 19-year-old will write something like:

1. When I was young, I was very troubled when my grandparents/parents fell ill
2. I was so inspired by the professionals who tended to them
3. I am a person with great personal attributes like empathy, commitment, perseverance, honesty and sincerity
4. I want to be a clinician scientist to help people, and save the world

These are all great stuff. But seriously, this Hobbit thinks the interviewers would be happier if some wise guy just wrote the truth – doctors get paid to work like maids, come home feeling half dead, and obviously have no time or energy to get laid (with their spouse or otherwise).

You are also required to write an essay together with the other applicants one day in a large room. The purpose of this is to test your ability to do something that is completely unrelated to the task at hand (which is whether you are suited to being a doctor), which is important as we doctors all know such unrelated tasks are part and parcel of our everyday lives. Especially for doctors working in public institutions. These unrelated tasks include:

1. Attending annual hospital retreats
2. Understanding service quality data
3. Passing Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education audits
4. Passing Joint Commission International audits
5. Giving ridiculous performances onstage during public hospital X's annual dinner and dance

Finally, if after all the abovementioned abuse, for some miraculous reason, you are still alive and have been called up for the interview, there are some things you should never do during the interview:

1. Burp
2. Dig your nose
3. Display armpit hair; and
4. Display honesty

Despite all your doubts and misgivings, you have to show your sincerity (which is different from honesty) about wanting to be a doctor.

You may think that the interviews are conducted by experienced doctors and there are certain answers that will be better received than others. You cannot be more wrong. The

people on the panels may include some or all of the following:

1. Old RI boys who hate candidates from Anglo-Chinese School (ACS)
2. Old ACS boys who hate candidates from RI
3. Nurses who like doctors (especially when the doctors are dead)
4. Disgruntled GPs
5. Disgruntled specialists
6. Frustrated academics
7. The Dean

Of course, occasionally, you may meet one interviewer who is generally not frustrated, not disgruntled and didn't come from RI or ACS. Good luck. The Dean may ask you, "Who is the Dean?" Giving the wrong answer is not a wise thing to do under such circumstances. The other thing is never show any doubt when interviewers offer you other career options like Dentistry, Pharmacy or Nursing. You must tell the panel you are prepared to kill your grandmother, pawn your gonads and sell your soul just to become a doctor. And if you are an overseas candidate, you will swear a solemn oath never to insult Singaporeans or criticise Singapore online, offline or in between.

Finally, the above process largely refers to the admission selection process for YLLSoM. Now if you are applying to LKCSOM, you would have to take the BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT), which is different from the United Kingdom Clinical Aptitude Test and which is also held at about the same time as the "A" Levels. Someone should really complain to the Queen about this. It makes you wonder how the Kingdom is going to stay United when they can't even get their act together on how to select medical students in one standardised way. In addition to the BMAT, you get to have mini-interviews with eight interviewers sequentially. A bit like one of those tacky social events that feature speed-dating...

As for Duke-NUS, because it is a very *atas* and "boutique" medical school where all things are American, this Hobbit actually has absolutely no clue how admission selection is done, except that it's for graduates, cost twice as much as YLLSoM and takes one year lesser than an undergraduate course. It is supposed to better prepare a student for the rigours of the American residency system which this country has adopted for reasons that are unfathomable.

Whatever the case, should you be selected into one of these medical schools, please do remember that becoming a doctor demands the greatest of commitment, hardship and discipline. But there are some perks to the job. These include:

1. Free parking in hospitals and mortuaries
2. Free medical consultation from your colleagues
3. Your parents' undying gratitude and pride for bringing honour to your family and clan (unless they are also doctors) even though their other investment banker offspring gives them three times more money than you do
4. Being named in patients' obituaries (this perk is NOT enjoyed by investment bankers and lawyers, so there!) **SMA**