

Things I learnt

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Abstract

I cannot say that ever since I was a child I wanted to be a doctor. Infact, I wanted to become a cosmonaut. When I told my father this, he did not say “*nahi, tum doctor banoge*”. Instead, he took me to a book exhibition and bought my very first book: “A to Z: How to become a Cosmonaut”. My parents always emphasised on a good education but never forced it on me. I was accepted into Hebei Medical University, China for the course of MBBS in 2004 and these are the things I learnt..

With growing demand in medicine as a career and tough competition due to limited seats in India for both undergraduate & postgraduate courses, many look beyond Indian horizons to fulfill our dream of becoming a doctor. Russia, Ukraine, China, Belarus & The Philippines have been popular destinations for students who want to pursue medical education outside India. The major factor responsible for this is the relatively lower fee structure and better infrastructure. It also helps that the enrollment into the course is not via a competitive examination like here in India.

I was accepted into Hebei Medical University, China for the course of MBBS in 2004. Though I kept my mind open for what is to come, my first impressions of China were better than what I imagined. I was seen off by parents & brother in Delhi, my first flight experience let alone an international one. After reaching Beijing International Airport, we were received by the staff of the university. The 1½ hour bus ride from Pudong Airport, Beijing to Hebei Medical University is something that I would always remember. I knew that China had beautiful landscapes, but it was breathtaking to experience it in person. After reaching the University, we had a welcome address by the Chancellor and then a tour of the campus.

Hebei Medical University has a 120 year old history as one of the oldest and AAA graded medical schools in China recognised by World Health Organization (WHO). It has 6 hospitals with a combined bed capacity of over 4500 beds. There are around 400 professors and 1000 associate professors working full time apart from several international senior researchers and visiting professors. Our first lecture was taken by Padma Shri Professor Mahdi Hasan, the prominent Indian Anatomist, and it was during this lecture I learnt how great a teacher Professor Hasan was. ***It was him that taught me it was not just knowledge that separates a good doctor from a great doctor but also kindness, compassion and patience, qualities that every doctor must strive to have.*** I also had the opportunity to meet Dr. SJ Nagalotimath, the Director of Karnataka Institute of Medical Sciences & eminent pathologist who was researching on snake venoms. Our university housed one of the biggest

research laboratory in the whole of Asia. It took me some time to let the grandeur of the institution sink in as I had a modest average Indian schooling.

The lecture halls have a freshness of their own where you always want to go hangout even when the classes are not in schedule. Huge libraries with world class literature, well-equipped labs, where you can always test your knowledge to its best and above all helping teachers and professors. I found that the faculty of Hebei Medical University are extremely helpful, who are always willing to extend their help in both academic situations and personal ones in spite of their busy schedules.

As a foreign student, it was mandatory for me to complete a short-course in basic mandarin. Mandarin is a difficult language to master. It took me almost 5 years to speak mandarin fluently. However, I also picked up Nepali, Kannada & Malay from my roommates and friends who used to make me translate telugu movies into their native language. ***Thanks to their love of South Indian movies, I now am fluent in 6 languages.***

The third year course included Obstetrics & Neonatology, subjects I used to dread and fear, I cannot really tell why. It was Dr. Uma Sunkari, who made it her personal project to alleviate me of my fears & do well in my exams. ***I am ever indebted to Dr. Uma for teaching me a valuable lesson on how to overcome my fears.***

The teaching faculty were extremely well trained and were always there for us. Dr. PN Pandit, who was from Andhra Pradesh like me, was the Senior Professor of Surgery & Clinical Coordinator, University of Malaysia visiting the university as faculty. He was a guru to me and always had encouraging words for me whenever I used to approach him with any difficulty. Professor D’Cruz who was a visiting faculty from PGIMER, Chandigarh taught me the importance of hard work & dedication and how success and appreciation would follow automatically. He also guided me in my preparation for post-graduate entrance exam which I appeared after returning back to India.

Academics in medicine can be exhaustive and students usually suffer from depression and homesickness. Extracurricular activities to an extent

helped me relieve the stress that I experienced as a student. I have had the opportunity to participate & represent India in many inter-college & inter-university cultural & sports activities along with students from around the world. I along with my friends from Japan, Belgium, Vietnam, Korea & USA, also represented my university in Chinese Singing competition on a live national TV Station on New Years Eve, 2009 which could not be possible to do if I were studying in India. The exposure I have had from my 6 year stay in China is priceless to me and something I would cherish throughout my life.

I traveled a lot, visited the homes of my friends & teachers, learnt their culture, spoke their language, ate in their homes, participated in their festivals and played with their kids. The love and affection I got from them and their family is a gift.

I am where I am today because of my teachers, parents & friends. I cannot thank my teachers enough for giving me the guidance, the support and most of all believing in me. In this fast paced competitive world, a lot of focus is given on the destination so we tend to forget to enjoy the journey. The real joy is not in completing the task, but in doing it.