



BEYOND THE WARDS

A Reflection on Six Months of Intercalated Honours

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As I look back on the first six months of my intercalated MBChB/ BMedSc(Honours) journey in Medical Biochemistry, I find myself standing in the delicate space between imposter syndrome and self-assurance. For the longest time, my reality felt surreal. It felt as though I wasn't really a research honour student, that any day now, someone would tap me on the shoulder, remind me that I am just a medical student and point me back to the clinical wards.

Coming from the deeply ingrained, rigid structure of my MBChB degree, stepping into the real of research felt like being thrown to the wind. In medicine, your path is paved for you; you know exactly where you need to be and by what time. In honours, I was suddenly expected to stand entirely on my own two feet, navigating the ambiguity of science like an adult who had life completely figured out. Wrestling with the weight of that independence was not easy.

Truth be told, for those first three months, I deeply missed the certainty of medicine. It was my first love, the degree I had come to call home. There wasn't a single day that passed without a quiet, lingering thought: *What if I just went back?* Looking back, I can recognize the classic "grass is greener" syndrome at play, but at the time, the homesickness for clinical routine was heavy. The shift was jarring, and the gloom of transition often clouded my vision.

Yet, beneath that initial struggle, this intercalated year offered me something the relentless pace of clinical training never could: the gift of time. This pause from medicine became a profound opportunity to re-evaluate who I am outside of the hospital. It gave me the space to genuinely prioritize self-care, to take mental health days, and to build professional and personal resilience.

Navigating my own health and neurodiversity during the time was not just a personal challenge; it gave me a raw, real-time perspective on the very pathology I dedicate my days to studying. By embracing resilience workshops, mentorships, and newfound grace policies, I learned that stepping away from the wards wasn't a detour, but a necessary breath. I was finally learning how to nurture myself, not just my career.

Eventually, the evening gave way to glorious new days. I discovered an unexpected passion for bioinformatics. A field I had completely written off as "too difficult" just a year ago. I found a new rhythm in the coursework. The classes were far more relaxed than the grueling medical blocks, yet deeply informative. More importantly, I learned how to learn again: How to take a lecture, identify the gaps in my knowledge, and independently source the missing information. I was no longer just absorbing facts; I was actively building my own understanding.

My journey over the past six months has been an absolute rollercoaster, but I am finally starting to properly find my feet. Today, I am exactly where I need to be: in the BSL-2 lab, mastering complex techniques like proteomics, and inching ever closer to finally performing my honours experiment on Dissecting Host Mediated PKnG immune evasion mechanisms.

The imposter syndrome still whispers occasionally, but my self-assurance now speaks louder. I look forward to the experiments ahead, confident in the knowledge that this “pause” has fundamentally shaped the clinician-scientist, and the person I am becoming.