

A reflection on the IDI Honours year so far...

This year has been an incredible journey, both academically and personally. Coming from the MBChB programme, it was a significant change to suddenly find myself sitting in the IDM cafeteria - something I had always looked at enviously while walking past! This year has been everything I expected, and so much more.

I knew I would be surrounded by people doing groundbreaking research, but I do not think I fully appreciated just how groundbreaking that work was until I became part of this environment. What has made the experience even more remarkable is the culture within the Institute. The same researchers whose work is shaping the field are happy to have casual conversations over coffee, despite being jetlagged from presenting at international conferences or receiving prestigious awards in Spain! It has made the research environment feel both inspiring and incredibly welcoming.

I have been genuinely honoured, and immensely grateful, to have had the opportunity to enter the research space at UCT. I have left every lecture, tutorial and practical with the same thought: *"They are so passionate about what they do."* To say it has been inspiring would be an understatement. It has reinforced my confidence that taking a year away from medicine was the right decision. I would be lying if I said I never questioned that decision, but as the year progressed, those doubts gradually disappeared. I could not be happier with my choice, the opportunities it has provided, or the environment I have had the privilege of being part of.

One of the greatest privileges of this year has been experiencing both ends of the medical spectrum - the bedside and the bench. Seeing how research directly informs patient care has confirmed that this is where I belong. It is a reassuring feeling that would have meant the world to my third-year self, who spent so much time wondering whether taking this risk would be worthwhile. I am incredibly grateful to have been accepted into the Intercalated programme, which has allowed me to pursue my aspirations more fully than I imagined possible.

Ultimately, this year has taught me that taking risks in pursuit of your aspirations is worthwhile. The journey to get here was not always easy, but the outcome has exceeded anything I could have hoped for. I am excited about my future as a clinician-scientist and look forward to working at the interface between research and clinical medicine, helping to bridge the gap between scientific discovery and patient care to create meaningful change.

Outside of academia, this year has been equally rewarding. I have met so many incredible people in my class. While I had hoped to make new friendships, I was also worried that I would spend the year missing my friends in medicine as they moved into the clinical environment. I could not have been more wrong. I have met people who are all unique, passionate and driven, and I genuinely feel that I have learnt something from every one of them. Once again, I found myself surrounded by people whose passion and drive are truly inspiring.

I quickly realised that there was much I still had to learn, particularly about the world of research, but support has always been readily available. To my IDI classmates, thank you for your guidance - not only in navigating research, but also for patiently teaching me everything outside of clinical signs and pathogenesis, including what a well-presented research article actually looks like!

On a more personal level, the change in pace from the medical curriculum was a welcome one, but it also taught me a great deal about myself. I realised that I had become heavily reliant on external pressure for motivation, and that the time-management skills I believed I had developed during medicine were, in many ways, driven by constant deadlines. This year challenged me to become more disciplined and less dependent on urgency to stay productive.

I also embraced opportunities outside of academics. I began training for a marathon, established a consistent gym routine, and even started waitressing - which, admittedly, may have been my way of filling my schedule enough to recreate a sense of pressure! More importantly, however, the resilience and perseverance I developed during medicine have translated into other aspects of my life. Throughout the year, I kept reminding myself that this improved work-life balance was only temporary, but as time has gone on, I have become hopeful that it is something I can carry with me back into medicine next year.

Overall, this Honours year has taught me far more than I anticipated. Above all, it has given me confidence that I am exactly where I am meant to be-with the right people, at the right time, pursuing the work I am passionate about. For that, I am incredibly grateful.