

So you want to be a Foundation Doctor

Alexandra Murphy

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Mater Infirmorum Hospital, 47-51 Crumlin Road, Belfast BT14 6AB.

Correspondence to Alexandra Murphy.

amurphy30@qub.ac.uk

The torment of medical finals has subsided and you have been rewarded with the honour of graduating with a medical degree. A few months of recuperation and FY1 commences with an induction period where you are imparted with a number of essential protocols. The remainder of the induction comprises a variety of speakers who often are incorporated into the programme to make you aware of services specific to the hospital you have been assigned.

Your first year as a doctor passes by in a whiz of venflons, ward rounds and discharge scripts. The best learning opportunities occur when you are faced with a sick patient or an unfamiliar symptom. You make your initial assessments and intervene where appropriate. By completing an Advanced Life Support course early in the year, your competence and confidence in approaching sick patients can be greatly boosted.

As an FY1 with limited experience, you will call on your SHO when unsure of a diagnosis or management plan. This presents an ideal opportunity to learn from your seniors and gain feedback on your initial assessment and proposed management plan. After a few short months you will have progressed to FY2 and will have the new FY1s approaching you for advice and support. They will ask for guidance in the treatment of patients but also in coping with the adjustment to life working as a doctor. The long working hours and pressure to perform can take its strain. Some adapt quickly to their new roles, while others take time to develop new coping

strategies and methods of managing the emotional stresses. By sharing your experiences of FY1 you can give reassurance and encouragement to those who need it.

FY2 also brings a number of new challenges and duties. You will be faced with new clinical tasks including outpatient clinics, taking referrals from other specialties and perhaps performing more advanced procedures. You will hold a more senior position within your team and will not only have to prioritise your own jobs but delegate tasks to your juniors. This may also include organisation of post-graduate teaching sessions and clinical audits.

Applying for specialty training is an additional challenge faced during FY2. There are many resources available to both research a variety of specialties and to make yourself competitive for the application process. It is important to find time to organise a taster module. These few days in your chosen specialty provide ample opportunities to speak to both trainees and trainers. You can gain an insight into the training involved in the specialty and also the lifestyle you can expect as you progress. They can also advise you on appropriate courses to attend and suitable audit or research topics. Ideally you should complete the audit cycle and present your results at a local or national meeting or have them published in a journal.

Having researched specialty training, some will decide upon an alternative route following FY2. There are those who are attracted to spending time abroad, while others are keen to pursue a contrasting post-graduate qualification such as a music diploma.

Whatever route you take through your Foundation Years, it is a time to recognise and develop the knowledge and skills you acquired during medical school. You will value the time as an opportunity to gain confidence in your abilities and to develop friendships across all disciplines. It is an opportunity to reflect on your work and institute change where you see a difference can be made. Above all, your Foundation Training is a period during which you can make plans and preparations for your future life and career.

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