Dear Freshers,

Congratulations on making it to Cambridge and to possibly one of the best colleges to study Medicine in Cambridge! My name is Andrew and I am a second year medic. I am currently a #CambTweet-er, and also the Treasurer for Downing’s Whitby Medical and Veterinary Society and the Computing Officer of the university MedSoc.

Being in university is going to be a significant change from school and can be daunting and stressful. However, everyone gets through it at the end and you are definitely not alone! Downing usually have around 16 medics and 2 vets. You will go the similar lectures and practical and will surely become very good friends!

You will have three main modules in your first year, which, despite their fancy name, are really just anatomy (Functional Architecture of the Body), biochemistry (Molecules in Medical Science) and physiology (Homeostasis). In addition to that there are also smaller modules introducing you to sociology, ethics and law of medicine (Social Context of Health and Medicine), statistics and epidemiology (Introduction to the Scientific Basis of Medicine), and skills in communications with patients (Preparing for Patients A). These modules are very different from those three major modules, in that they often require more personal reflection and in some aspect, expression of your personal opinion. In addition, Preparing for Patients A, in particular, takes the form of a coursework instead of a formal examination.

On an average week, you will have approximately ten hours of lectures, four hours of dissections, four hours of practical, and three hours of supervisions, although these hours can also vary quite significantly. Unfortunately, we do regularly have lectures starting at 8.45am or 9am, although a number of those are at Downing site, which is simply a 2 or 3 minutes’ walk! We also sometimes have weekend supervisions, but the amazing supervisors – we usually have either clinical medical student or practicing doctors as supervisors – we have definitely makes up for it! Typically, you will need to hand in lab reports for Homeostasis practical every other week or so, and will have around 2-3 essays set by supervisors every week. Your supervisors will most probably expect them to be handwritten. It might seem difficult at first, but you will eventually get the hang of it! Supervisors are also often very willing to give help with respect to writing essays.

Despite the great deal of work and the occasional weekend supervisions, there are some perks to studying medicine. The large size of the year group means that there are many chances for medics to socialize! There are numerous med events run throughout the year both by Whitby and the university MedSoc. In college, we will be organizing the annual Whitby dinner, regular speaker-formal events and some other secretive surprise events. There are also many amazing events run by Cambridge MedSoc such as bar crawls, bops and the renowned MedSoc ball. We also often take the initiative to organize swaps with people in the same dissection table!

A few advices for the coming year:
- Try to go over things you have learnt as you go along and read through handouts before the lecture and dissections. You will find that you need to learn a lot more things within a shorter period of time so breaking them down will certainly help!
- However difficult it may be, do work as they’re set and avoid doing it the night before. We’ve all pulled an all-nighters and it’s not worth it!
- Make the most of your supervisors. They are amazing and have personally gave me a lot of help when I was struggling with the course last year! Prepare for supervisions and do flag problems up to supervisors as they occur.
- For anatomy, make the best use of dissections! You are examined on these at the end of the year and it’s easy to dismiss them in the beginning. Go through the dissection manual in advance, power through the individual dissections, utilize the demonstrators (that’s what they’re for) and upcoming revision will be much easier!
- Make the most of the support network available to you. Your Tutor and Director of Studies will always be there for any problems, whether academic or pastoral, you have, so don’t feel embarrassed about speaking to them if you need that. Besides them, medics (and in particular Downing medics) are extremely friendly so do speak to one of us, whether your college parents, any of the Whitby committee or me! We’ve been through what you will be going through so we very much understand the difficulties you may face during first year!
- Despite the wide range of social events, don’t forget to sleep. It is after all essential both for you to learn well and for you to stay healthy. Some lecturers do publicly name and shame those who sleep during lectures!
- But most importantly have fun: have a life outside Medicine. Go out, join societies, play sport, go to formals, chill out with friends or do whatever you like. Despite what you think (and what your Director of Studies may suggest) Medicine doesn’t have to be all you do at Cambridge and you will have a much easier and happier time if you have a bit of fun!

Medicine at Cambridge is extremely different from that of elsewhere. You can feel a bit upset at times but remember if you try your best everything will literally be just fine - this year will eventually pass and you will be amazed at what you’ve achieved looking back (like I do) in a years’ time!

Hope you’re all excited for October! At the meantime, enjoy the rest of your summer! Feel free to tweet to me at @CambTweetMedic or email me at internet@jcr.dow.cam.ac.uk if you have any questions or any concerns!

Medics’ Love,
Andrew