

OVER TO THE MEDIC IN THE STUDIOS

SHE'S A FIFTH YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT WHO SPENT 3 WEEKS WITH SKY NEWS -EMILY PULL, BACK TO YOU IN THE STUDIO...



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STAFF WRITER

AS I walked in past a friendly looking Eamon Holmes fresh from the big screen, it struck me that my days of traipsing round dreary hospital wards were likely to be poor preparation for the slick world of Sky News. Little had I known when I interviewed Thomas Moore, the health correspondent at Sky News for the Medical Student a few months ago, that it would lead me here.

My three week stint as Thomas' right hand medical student certainly was a world away from clinical medicine and what a refreshing change it was. For once, rather than being belittled by old school consultants and generally accepting that I knew very little, at Sky I was the medical knowledge.

The first week began with a run down of the what's hot and not for medical and health matters - here is where the first lesson was learnt. I rapidly realised that what a geeky medical student finds fascinating, the discerning public most likely do not. Out of the window went all those ideas of educating the public on the finer points of medicine and in came a swift education in what makes a good story. In television, not only must you consider the story, but what images are going to make it into an eye-catching 'package' for one of the bulletins.

My first day was straight into the thick of it, with Thomas editing a story that had taken months of work - an undercover expose of 'dodgy' dentists. Some of the undercover footage was quite unbelievable

and it made for a fascinating piece. Then followed a viewing with one of the in-house lawyers to make sure it followed the rules.

An exciting week ensued - a trip to Cambridge to interview one of the doctors who published amazing results for alemtuzumab in the treat-



ment of MS (see requisite article elsewhere in the issue) and then to the MS Society in London to get their take on the results. Elsewhere in the country, another of the Sky reporters was interviewing a patient who had received the drug to add the

press were not allowed to broadcast or publish the piece until a set time.

The difficult job begins once filming is over - editing the footage to fit the minute or two of air time allocated. This doesn't just apply to small stories but also to the dodgy dentists piece -

from the months of work came a package of around 3 minutes. And it's a fierce battle - if a better story comes in, there's a distinct chance your work might be 'biffed' - that's technical speak for off air and one big waste of time.

During my time at

Fogle had been 'struck down'. The writer saw my potential early on with encouragement that, given I was the only one who could pronounce the disease, I should most definitely be the one to write the story. My ability to think laterally was tested when my second,

distinctly non-medical assignment for Sky News Online was to try and contact 'shock-jocks' in America to get their view on the Russell Brand/Jonathan Ross debacle. Needless to say, that article didn't carry the 'Final Year Medical Student' tagline beneath my name.

The final week saw Thomas and I head to a Department of Health press conference about 'top-up' drugs - a new initiative by the government to allow patients to privately fund drugs and add them to their NHS care. With allegations from the opposition of the government trying to bury bad news in the midst of election fever, amazingly the story made it onto air the day before voting in the US.

The night of the elections saw a whirlwind of activity: from the hectic gallery coordinating reporters in various corners

of the US to the graphics team frantically updating their impressive Obama-McCain graphics, this was an amazing opportunity to see the whole of the Sky News team come together to put on a truly impressive night of election coverage.

Later that week after much catch up sleep on my part and relief on Thomas' that we could finally get some non-America stories on air, we headed to a press conference with Robert Winston on his new plans to 'humanise' pigs to create transplant organs. A bizarre idea and a gold mine for the tabloid journalists. With other journalists readily illustrating their lack of science background with some gems about the possibility of transplanting eyeballs, it was with some pride that I looked on as Thomas asked intelligent questions about pancreatic hormones.

As the end of the internship drew near, I realised that I had learnt a lot about the cut and dry world of television news and I had certainly developed a harder shell. On a news channel like Sky, there is no room for viewers to be bored and for a medic to learn what makes a good story was more of a challenge than I had imagined. For someone who knows so much about medicine and health without a medical degree in sight, it was a proud moment when Thomas bid me farewell: "I'm glad you're going, you actually know about medicine - I've had to watch what I say the last three weeks."

To see such delights as 'Leishmaniasis: More About the Flesh-Eating Bug' and my article on shock-jocks, go to www.sky.com/news

MEDICS IN THE MEDIA

Dr Thomas Stuttford:
columnist for *The Times*



Dr Raj Persaud:
Consultant Psychiatrist,
UCL graduate,
former resident psychiatrist on 'This Morning'.



Dr Ayan, Dr Barbara, Dr George and Dr Jonty:
of *Street Doctor* fame.



Dr Rob Hicks:
Media GP and script adviser for *Doctors*.



'ah' factor to the piece. There was a real sense of excitement around the story - never before had results like this been seen for an MS drug and the results were strictly embargoed meaning the

Sky, I had the opportunity to do some writing for the website with some of the team who are constantly updating the site. The first task was to write a piece on leishmaniasis - by which TV star Ben