

THE WORD FROM DOWN UNDER

Ozzie med student correspondent Pallavi Prathivadi reports on happenings at

G'DAY readers! I hope you're enjoying the holiday season; it's so hot in Melbourne that I'm considering protesting clothing!

Some of you may have read about the current public hospital system crisis in Victoria. The Australian Medical Association (AMA) recently organized a blog for doctors and medical students to publish their concerns and insights into practice at the Victorian public hospitals. Though one can find similar complaints worldwide, this sudden outcry for help has caught the attention of the media, government officials and the public.

Victorian interns are currently the lowest-paid nationally and the dramatic increase in the number of medical graduates (to address the doctor shortage) is creating limitations on the em-

ployment and salary of junior doctors. All undergraduate medical students trained in Victoria under a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) are guaranteed a one-year internship in a Victorian



public hospital. However, as the number of medical students has nearly doubled, but the infrastructure of the hospitals remains the same, an intern can only be paid for a certain number of hours. Employers claim that all interns must be given equal salary opportunities, and therefore rostered the same number of hours per fortnight.

The administrators at various hospitals have revised the policies concerning over-time pay, and interns are now being denied remuneration for the additional hours they work, which sometimes can be a loss of over 50 hours. One junior doctor wrote on the AMA blog "I work 77 hour weeks - only trouble is I'm paid for 43 come rain, hail, or shine!"

Government officials who question the need to work the extra hours have been strongly rebuked by the doctors-in-training; the financial pressures at public hospitals are seriously affecting patient care, and doctors are just unable to provide adequate medical attention in the limited number of hours they are paid for. Junior doctors are collaborating to address this

crisis, and often through bold actions: A strike was planned at Melbourne's Alfred Hospital involving doctors refusing to work after 5.30pm, as any later would have been considered unpaid over-time. The doctors were immediately threatened with legal action, and the strike was withheld.

Many doctors prefer not to fight the authorities, and instead leave the



Victorian public hospitals to find jobs in the private sector or in other states. Victorian interns are paid



approximately \$20 000 less than their Queensland counterparts, and the dissatisfaction is highly

evident; especially considering that junior doctors are all facing the same challenges of housing, training fees, university course debts and personal expenses, the Victorian interns will be at a long-term disadvantage.

I'll be graduating in 2011, and though I hope the hospital administrators

and Australian government will address these issues by then, I am

mentally prepared to leave Melbourne. It's a sad thought, as this city is my home, but if I can avoid the unhappiness relating to Victorian public hospitals, then I shall.

Signing off from sunny shores,

Pallavi Prathivadi
(blog can be accessed at <http://doctors4hospitals.blogspot.com/>)

MS'S SUB-ED SEEMA ATTENDED A PHILOSOPHICAL TALK AT IMPERIAL. THE GUEST SPEAKER WAS A GURU, WHO TRAINED AND WORKED AS A DOCTOR IN INDIA BEFORE STUDYING VENDANTA, THE ART OF LIVING, AND NOW LECTURES YOUNG PEOPLE AND PROFESSIONALS ON ITS APPLICATION TO MODERN LIFE'

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 **SEEMA PATTINI**
SUB-EDITOR

Life as a London medical student can be exhilarating, fun, busy, busy, busy, and fast-paced. And actually, it's sometimes hard to pause. Slow down. STOP. Heaven forbid. Think.

Could you let all those huggling balls juggling float suspended? For a split second. Just to remember what lies in the eye of the storm, at the centre of the hustle and bustle and noise. Well what exactly is there? You, I guess. But when was the last time you looked at yourself properly - looked at yourself for longer than the few seconds allocated to sort your hair out? Not just looked. Connected.

With yourself.

'Get connected!' the lady in the orange sari shouts. Shouting, perhaps, to permeate your whirring, whirling thoughts, or perhaps because she just felt like shouting. You stir and look up. 'Those who have no noise in their minds are rare people', you nod, kind of agree and wonder whether you'll get time to read your notes on how to avoid being Mr Blobby in clinic tomorrow. Sigh, tomorrow is with more orthopaedic surgeons.

'Stop identifying yourself with your thoughts, your likes and dislikes and building layers and layers over your true self'. Huh? What? And why is she shouting again? If I don't identify with my thoughts then what am I supposed

to identify with? Emotions? 'How can you base yourselves on changing things?' Oh, right, thoughts are volatile. True. 'Ego is based on thought patterns and once we become aware of these thought patterns we become them...I like this, I don't like that...I am this, I'm not that'. You don't have a big ego so it's ok. You relax and giggle to yourself about whether that arrogant registrar you despise could stomach all this. 'No!' Uh oh. 'Everyone has an ego - if you have dislikes and likes you have an ego'. Great. 'We have egos together: as communities, societies, nations. And when your ego is challenged you feel threatened, you create pain for yourself'. Well that's easy then, enter cynical smirk.

'Live in the constance of your own presence, let the functions of the body, mind and world go round and be fulfilled. Be constantly aware of who you are and detach from your thoughts'.

Impressive. You think? In fact, a lot of what the Guru was talking about was applicable to working as a doctor: letting go of 'ego' and preferences, having natural compassion for everyone, responding rather than reacting and giving 100% to every task your'e given could make one a great doctor. It's hard to be like that though, in an environment which is competitive and achievement based, in this society, in London, in this day and age but then again, maybe I'm just making excuses for myself.