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Subject: Why Does Sam Experience Culture Shock in Her Third Year?



THE CULTURE SHOCK OF NEW CLERKSHIPS



In their third year of medical school, students regularly move to new clerkships. Each clerkship can be a real culture shock

WHAT IS THE CULTURE SHOCK OF NEW CLERKSHIPS?

During the first two years of medical school Sam's schedule, classrooms, and faculty are quite consistent. Clerkships are extremely different, which can be a big culture shock to many medical students. Every time Sam starts a new clerkship, it's like she's starting a new job, so she has to learn to adapt quickly. She has to find the parking lot, the right department or office, and get to know her new team. Many medical students feel like starting new clerkships is like learning a new language. For example, the same three-letter acronym may mean something entirely different, depending on which area of medicine students are working in.

Sam's daily schedule and activities can change a lot between clerkships. During her surgery clerkship, she may have to wake patients up at 5 a.m., and help out in the emergency department. During her Internal Medicine clerkship Sam will need to deliver medical plans, assessments, and oral presentations. During her Pediatrics clerkship Sam will need to know when to give certain vaccines, and which milestones are important for child development. Completing different clerkships allows students to experience many different areas within medicine, which will help Sam work out which field she wants to work in. For instance, Sam may discover that she really enjoys working with children, which may make her decide to work in Pediatrics.

HOW DO STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THE CULTURE SHOCK OF CLERKSHIPS?

It can be very tiring for medical students to start a new clerkship every few weeks, and the learning curve for each rotation is steep. One former student said: "just as you are feeling comfortable in your role in one rotation, you get dropped into the deep end of another and feel dumb all over again." Sam will study each rotation in advance, and ask her classmates for tips on how to cope, but it will be hard for her to predict which rotations she will find difficult. During the hardest rotations, many students find comfort in knowing that they will move to a different rotation in a few weeks.

Students will work with a lot of people during their clerkships. Some of these people may be impatient with new students, so Sam must learn quickly, and develop a thick skin. Most medical students accept that they will get things wrong, and that they will feel lost at times. However, Sam may find it hard to accept when she is wrong, and to adjust to new environments, which could make her feel angry, sad, or frustrated with herself. On the other hand, Sam is now working in the 'real world' of medicine, performing like a real doctor. She will also work with people who support and inspire her, which means she will enjoy some clerkships more than others.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT SAM REGARDING THE CULTURE SHOCK OF CLERKSHIPS?

- Understand that Sam has hardly any control over her schedule during her third year. It will be hard for her to find time to talk, and it is unlikely she will make many plans.
- Listen to Sam when she gets in touch. She may need to vent and complain. She can't do this at work, so talking to you will help.
- Remind Sam that she is intelligent and capable. She may be frustrated with herself for not learning quickly.
- Start a conversation with Sam by asking questions like these:
 - How was your day?
 - Which rotation are you doing right now?
 - How is this rotation going?
 - How are you coping with changing rotations?
 - What has been your favorite rotation so far?
 - What are your current team like?
 - How do you feel about the doctors you work with?
 - How have your different rotations informed which area of medicine you would like to work in?

- Remind Sam that you are there for her. Show her that you care by making her dinner, sending her a care package, or just by keeping her company.
- Don't be offended if Sam doesn't want to talk. She may be too tired to answer all of your questions. Come back to the conversation when she has more energy.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CULTURE SHOCK OF CLERKSHIPS

- [The Darkest Year of Medical School](#) / Slate
- [A Day in the Life of Clerkship Part 1](#) / Studentdoctor.net
- [A Day in the Life of Clerkship Part 2](#) / Studentdoctor.net