Reach Out for the Star

Young man, I understand that you have read books, but you did not comprehend!

Muhammad Shoyab

THERE might be a medical college across your street; you might be able to enter through its gates and even the doors. Getting to sit at the desks, however, is a difficult business. This article is for those A-Level students and graduates who are thinking of studying medicine in Bangladesh. It is specially for the juniors from my school who say they keep on trying and are never able to reach me, and have either started thinking that I am annoyed by their questions or am finally able to realize just how much medical school can take away from a student's life the latter being the wiser assumption. It can also help you finally decide how ready you are to pledge yourself to memorizing tons of information, not getting to eat or sleep properly for weeks altogether and still not being able to satisfy the professor who would say, "Young man, I understand that you have read books, but you did not comprehend!"

BEFORE YOU LOOK

The popular saying asks you to look before you leap, but there are things you need to do before you can afford to even "look" at medical schools. Before you can reach out for the star or the moon, you need to stand on high ground. The minimum requirements are C's, but to start from a competitive position, you should have A's in Biology, Physics and Chemistry at A-Level, in addition to 6 A's at O-Level including these three subjects. Eligibility for medical admission is determined on a scale of 200 marks, of which 40 marks are for O-Level results (best six), 60 for A-Level results (Biology, Physics and Chemistry) and another 100 marks for an MCQ admission test. The admission test is highly competitive or rather eliminative, as it is designed pick about 1700 students from more than 20000 - all of them of the same caliber. Keep in mind that there were about 34000 A+'s in SSC last year, and more than 7000 A+'s in the HSC examinations. This means that almost all of the 1700 students who would ultimately make it to medical school will have A+ in both SSC and HSC, i.e. they will sit for the admission test having already scored 100 out of the 100 marks reserved for general education. To put yourself at par with these people, you must make sure that you also have 100 out of the 100 for general education results. I am assuming that those who are reading this have good grades at O-Level (i.e. at least 6 A's including Biology, Physics and Chemistry), so I would only remind you of the paramount importance of ensuring A's in A-Level Physics, Biology and Chemistry. Since 60 marks are reserved for three A-Level subjects, you should understand that each of these subjects carries 20 marks. An A gets you 20 all right, but a B scores not 19 but 16. So dropping one grade causes you to lose 4 marks, whereas differences in medical admission are often made on the basis of 0.1 marks.

GETTING STARTED

Just as you have studied hard and secured good grades and are thinking that you can recline on a couch, close your eyes and dream of medical school, I have a bad news for you you need to learn your subjects all over again! This is because the syllabus for the admission test is the HSC syllabus, which is bulkier and has to be studied in a way different from what you have acquainted yourself with at A-Levels. The difference lies in the fact that our entire education system is still based on the primitive concept of memorizing, which you would better adapt to at this point. In addition, half of HSC biology is botany and much of the other half (zoology) involves rats, guinea pigs, earthworms, etc, which are not taught at A-Level. Physics and chemistry have more chapters and each chapter has greater content than at A-Levels.

The admission test takes place on some Friday in November. This means that those of you who would finish A-Levels in June would have to hurry while those who finish in January would have some time, but not a lot of it. You would have to digest the same volume of information in a few months that is meant to be immersed in over two years. Therefore, get going as soon as your exams are over. Try to strike a partnership with an HSC cousin or neighbour who is also an MCAT candidate; make them your guru for a while and learn from them how to select which things to memorize. If they are reluctant towards studies, it is in your interest that you should make more attentive and sincere.