Try to be placed with the better students, those who take medical admission as a dream and not as a backup.

TAKE AIM

Most coaching centres give a memory test on the very first day, to discover how much you remember and to give you an insight into what you are to prepare yourself for. Having secured the 100 marks of general education, you need to know the minimum you need in the MCQ to remain in the race. Ask to see the results notification(s) of the previous year(s) and look at the pattern of marks obtained by students who were selected for admission. (Coaching centres do collect and preserve copies of the notifications, question papers, etc, so do not be deterred by their reluctance.) For example, the students who were selected for Dhaka Medical College in 2004 had obtained more than 170; in 2005, it was around 178 and this year they have scored 187 and above. Thus, know how much you need to get and how far you are from your target (compare with your memory test result) and get to work.

PLAN OF STUDY

The admission test asks questions from Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English grammar and General Knowledge. Practice general knowledge and English from past MCAT papers. For the science subjects, you would mainly need the HSC books and MCAT papers. Chapter wise / subject wise tests given by coaching centres are an important addition, so do not hesitate to collect and preserve them, old or new, along with their answer keys. Other than books, you will come across lecture sheets and guides. Your strategy would be to use a few highly efficient tools and discard the other somewhat helpful stuff. Before beginning each chapter, go through the MCAT and coaching questions on that chapter and try to answer them. Avoid guesswork here as you are trying to draw a line between your abilities and your shortcomings, not to score. Check your answers against the key. Since you have answered only those questions about which you were 100 percent confident, wrong answers mean that you are totally blank on those topics or have failed to understand the question. Look for explanations of the questions and answers in The Royal Guide. Having thus developed a basic idea of the requirements of each chapter and your flaws in it, read the chapter from the book and make sure you are now able to answer all the questions correctly. Do not try to digest the entire chapter from the book only learn as much as needed to answer the questions in front of you, because you will have to learn every chapter this way, anew! To ensure that you do not miss anything, have as many question papers as possible. Do not be tired of questions that are repeated answer them as many times as you face them, and make yourself absolutely at ease with such star questions. All of this is, as it sounds, a lot of work so do not waste time.

LECTURE SHEETS & GUIDES:

Once you have made yourself familiar and comfortable with books and question papers, take a glance at the lecture sheets provided by your centre (do not run after another centre's sheets if you think that their sheets and teachers are too good, switch over). If you feel that particular sheets help you answer certain questions more easily than books, add them to your arsenal, otherwise throw them away. Of the guidebooks your centre provides, look only at the MCQs (again, do not buy any other guide most are worthless). Do have a copy of The Royal Guide, however. This is a mammoth collection of MCQs from the last 10 years' (or more) MCATs and those prepared for coaching just what you are looking for. The uniqueness of the book lies in the fact that it explains each question and each choice and then takes you on a journey of explanation and derivation to the correct answer, leaving no gap between your understanding and the answer. The book arranges its contents in as many ways you would want to study chapter wise, subject wise and year wise, thus sparing you the trouble of hunting MCAT papers for questions on a particular topic. In my opinion, this is a must have.

FORMAT OF THE MCQ:

Most of us are familiar with the "one best answer" type of MCQ, but medical schools all over the world follow the "answer all options" type. Here, the student has to answer each choice as true or false, and marks are awarded against each. Leaving an option blank does not gain or lose you any mark. In the admission test, candidates are required to complete the circles against the true options and leave the false ones no option can thus be left unanswered. 1 mark is awarded for filling all the true circles and leaving all the false options of a particular question stem there is no fractional marking. Thus, there can be questions where your answer will be ABCD (all true) and others where you will not fill any circle (all false). There is no negative marking either.

SIT TIGHT

From the completion of A-Levels to the MCAT is a long, difficult and anxious journey the first of its kind in our lives. At its crossroads, life seems to have never been so miserable, the world never so cruel. One does not know what to call himself a student, but of what? Parents look up to your face everyday, and friends inquire at every meeting to know your vision of the future. Despite the golden grades under your belt, you feel helpless, and do not know the answer. Like the journey of life itself, this journey is full of vicissitudes. However, know that the light at the end of the tunnel will finally shine on whoever remains firm, resolute and can continue for a few more months the same hard work that they have been doing for years. While it is true that admission tests are challengingly different from certificate examinations and you have the greater trouble of a hitherto unacquainted syllabus, it is also true that the condition is the same with everyone else, and many have treaded the same path before you. If those before you could do it, if those around you can do it, you can also do it. This is how life is full of obstacles. Think of the barriers that you have overcome. Think of how impossible they had once seemed, and how you now feel that you never realized when you have triumphed over them. The questions of life have only one answer, as expressed in my personal favourite inspirational quote, "There are extraordinary men and there are extraordinary women, and there are extraordinary moments for them to treasure, but there is nothing more extraordinary than THEIR hard work and perseverance." Go at it, be at it, and hold your breath. Good luck!

(Sir Salimullah Medical College
Daily Star Awardee 2001& 2003)