

What I wish I knew when I started my internship

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In my first year of residency I faced a steep learning curve. I learned a lot about psychiatry, but I learned so much more about myself. If I had known then what I know now, my internship would have been smoother and more enjoyable.

Be organized. Create systems to remember your patients' information and your to-do list. I have templates of progress notes, psychiatry assessments, mental status assessments, "rounds sheets" (a sheet listing every patient on my floor, including their diagnoses, laboratories, medications, and other notes). Although my system involves lots of paper, I like it. Make a system that works for you.

Go out and have fun. I know you are tired, you haven't slept, and your apartment is a mess, but you won't remember that time you went home, did laundry, and went to bed early. You will remember the fun night when you and other interns went out and explored the city.

Unplug from medicine. Nothing is more boring than working for 12 hours, only to go out for drinks with coworkers and talk about work. Although you need to vent, life is more than medicine. Find time for something else. Read a book, play a video game, hang out with people who are not doctors. I started a monthly book club with other women around my age. Make some time for something other than your profession.

Reach out to your senior colleagues. I was so concerned about making a good first impression that I didn't share my concerns with others. I kept my head low because I always blame myself first when something is wrong.

During an off-service rotation, I was unable to finish my shift because I had food poisoning. To make up for that uncompleted shift, the chief from that service gave me 2 extra night shifts. I found the measure extreme, but thought it was my fault for going home early. A few days later, the Psychiatry Chief Resident approached me, after he had seen my schedule and spoke with the other chief because he found the situation unfair. He was reaching out to me saying, "We've got your back." I realized that it wasn't always my fault, and I could speak up when there was an issue. I was fortunate to have seniors and chiefs who looked out for me. I always found support, good advice, and respect for my feelings.

If you have questions or concerns, are anxious, or feel something is wrong, approach a senior or the chief. They were in your shoes once and will give you their best advice.

Medicine is different in the United States.

As an international medical graduate from Colombia, I panicked on my first day when



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Clinical Point

Unplug from medicine and make time for something other than your profession

everyone was talking in acronyms. I did not have a lot of U.S. clinical experience, and back home it's frowned upon to write full sentences in acronyms. My students helped me to get over it. I started my intern year in the general medical floor and felt so embarrassed. Then I realized that it didn't matter because it did not affect how I cared for my patients.

People understand that you are from another country. At the beginning, I used Google to search for everything, and then I realized that my 2 wonderful students didn't think less of me because I didn't know what BKA (below knee amputation) means. Do not be ashamed if you don't know how things work in a different country. You will find people who are willing to help you; you will learn, and it will be a minor thing a year from now.

Keep your support system. It was 3 AM in the emergency department, and on my break I went running out to the hallway feeling overwhelmed, tired, and lonely. I called my best friend across the globe.

If you moved away from home for residency, you are surrounded by new faces and far from the people you are comfortable with. Do not lose touch with them because you never know when you might need them the most. I had a hard road getting to where I am now, and many people helped me. You have to be there for them, too; a text message takes 30 seconds, and an e-mail, 1 minute.

Remember, you need to take care of yourself before taking care of others. No matter how much the MD or DO degree makes you feel like a superhero, you are still human.



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