

## Letters to the Editor

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### Studying for an intercalated BSc

Editor – The debate about whether to do an intercalated BSc seems to be ongoing.<sup>1,2</sup> Many reasons have cited for doing the degree, from enhancing your career to getting another long summer holiday. The drawbacks have been equally well publicized and range from having to take on the increased financial burden to dealing with the questions; what's the point? Will it make me a better doctor?<sup>2</sup>

Having both completed intercalated degrees in anatomy and psychology, respectively, our opinions about the value of doing an intercalated BSc have changed somewhat from the position we had adopted a year ago. Previously, we chose to intercalate to pursue our respective interests in anatomy and psychology and get a taste of doing re-

search. However, having completed the degree, we believe that doing an intercalated BSc can actually make you a better doctor.

The main reason is that it enables the student to understand fully evidence-based medicine, as now they have gained familiarity with accessing 'the evidence'. The attempt to develop evidence-based thinking is now part of the medical course and part of the practice of modern medicine. Any student who carries out a research project during the course of an intercalated degree knows how things are never black and white or clear cut and thus evidence has to be evaluated carefully and a balanced approach usually adopted. Thus skills of critical appraisal can be rapidly developed over the course of the academic year.

Having recently embarked on clinical medicine, we feel that issues of personal development are of value and should be considered prospectively by medical students weighing up whether to do an intercalated degree. We are not saying

that someone who does not do an intercalated degree cannot understand evidence-based medicine or that their skills of critical appraisal are in any way weak, it is just that doing an intercalated degree is likely to improve and develop these skills and we believe that these are reasons to consider actively in any decision about whether to do an intercalated degree, in addition to all the other benefits and drawbacks which have already been stated in the literature.<sup>3</sup>

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### References

- 1 Kaushik N. Students must value the hard slog. *BMA News* 2003;January:9.
- 2 Patel N. Will intercalating help me to perform better in my clinical years? *BMA News* 2003;January:4.
- 3 Leung W. Is studying for an intercalated degree a wise career move? *Student BMJ* 2001;9:418–9.