

Exclusive with Dr Riaz Agha

Interviewed by Ally Xiang



Let me introduce you to Dr Riaz Agha, doctor, editor and entrepreneur. Riaz is currently a house officer at Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. From the exterior, he may seem to be merely another medical student, who successfully graduated last summer from GKT (with distinctions in Medical Sciences and Special Studies); however, Riaz's resume [1] may far suppress your achievements combined, for he was not idle with his time! Apart from completing his degree, during his time at medical school, Riaz published over 20 articles in scientific journals, won 21 prizes and established his own 'International Journal of Surgery' [2]. He is now the managing editor of this influential journal, which is consulted by surgeons worldwide,

At the start of November, I had the pleasure of meeting with Riaz after his long shift on Oncology at Guy's. Dressed smartly but looking tired in Starbucks, he described his busy job as a PRHO (newly F1 recruit), working constantly from 0830 to around 1800. It is a change for him as dealing with patients with cancer differs from his previous placement on General Medicine. He is enjoying it despite the large amount of bureaucracy medics need to wade through first.

I previously met Riaz at an event centred on incorporating science ideas into business ventures. From the outset, Riaz was generous with his advice and experience

through med school; he came across as a determined, ambitious young man, who is also modest about his achievements. A comprehensive-turned-scholarship-to-private schoolboy, Riaz was not successful in his application to medical school first time round but he admits it was the best thing that has happened to him. He, instead, spent his year out at Harrods working full-time selling toys and gadgets. He realised it all there; "being successful in life is all about selling, people who are successful, are often good communicators, who are able to put across their ideas and get people to back them up, it is always about persuading others to do what you want them to do". Evidently, his mind was already different from his medical colleagues.

Riaz is always looking for opportunities from day one; for example, he picked up good communication and other generic skills at Harrods, which have been valuable to him even now. His worthwhile elective at Harvard made him realise how closely linked business and healthcare were to each other; there is a huge market out there in healthcare! He understood how his medical degree consisted of memorising new concepts all the time, letting his mind being trained in a very vigorous way, which is not too dissimilar from a business mind. He felt with his high valued degree, he would be able to apply his knowledge to medical journal publishing. Suddenly he felt "feverishly passionate" not about just becoming a doctor, but becoming the first student ever to launch a journal! Being a creative person, Riaz started to really enjoy business and entrepreneurship. He wanted





ever to launch a journal! Being a creative person, Riaz started to really enjoy business and entrepreneurship. He wanted creativity day in, day out, something not possible

in medicine. Nevertheless, he does not regret his degree at all, for in his opinion (and SMEC's also), "a medical student is studying the best degree out of all the degrees out there".

Students often ask him how he has achieved so much. According to him, students need to be "feverishly passionate" about medicine and to change their original way of thinking. Riaz indicates to me his first book "Making sense of your medical career" [3], which notes down, in a succinct and rather personal approach, the ways of becoming successful in medicine. The first chapter "Career building starts in the mind" importantly details the need to develop yourself before embarking on your career. It is a good practical career guide, and draws upon Riaz's knowledge of intercalated BSc, electives, publishing a book and writing the winning CV! This book is definitely worth a look at, not only to get Riaz's perspective but also to learn new ways of approaching medicine.



What do peers think of his success? Those who are younger than Riaz are happy for him as they are able to learn from what he has achieved. He says that students need to know their goals and also realise that there are other career options other than the standard¹⁹ medical specialities, in his case, medical publishing. He teaches the art of "hustling", to actively go for it: getting papers and making himself successful

in that job application for that specific job. Those of his level or above tend to be weary of him at first, becoming jealous occasionally. He comments that 'you have to be feverishly passionate and feverishly defensive as well'. With this attitude, nothing has held him back; no-one gets in his way for he is ruthless!

And what of his future? After F1 or 2, Riaz hopes to take a well-earned year out because he wants to make sure if he can truly commit himself to a 45-year career in which ever field he wants to end up in. He has always done things differently from others; he is not about to rush into anything he will later regret. This belated "gap year" along with his impressive CV may just give him the chance to step back and look at all his choices in medical specialities, pharmaceuticals, publishing or academia, and pick the most complementary one for him.

It would do all students good to take a leaf out of Riaz's book literally and metaphorically. His creativity, determination and positive attitude will hopefully be able to knock a lot of apathic students out of their spoon-fed med school monotony. Although we may know this, sometimes it takes someone like Riaz to tell you bluntly that "your future is what you make of it, make sure you grab every opportunity given to you, do not be passive, use your brain and enjoy the things you discover you really enjoy". I am certain Riaz will be a continued success which ever path he chooses.

References

1. Resume at <http://www.yourmedicalcareer.com/>
2. Subscribe to the journal at www.int-journal-surgery.com
3. Agha R. Making sense of your medical career. Your strategic guide to success. ISBN 0340887370