

Final year exams – the Otago experience

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Fifth year exams come on your radar early in your pre-clinical years when you hear about their fabled existence and the anecdotal levels of knowledge needed just to gain a pass. They represent the final climb of medical school and once passed, herald demi-doctor status.

This article is written in the immediate post-exam period whilst the tips and tricks I picked up are still entrenched in my mind and the patterns of eponymous syndromes still ring small bells in the back of my cluttered mind. In no way do I stand to financially benefit from any of the resources I referenced and I am not affiliated with any of them as far as I know. This is also written as my own personal opinion and I agree there are many more options/resources to study from.

MCQs:

In Dunedin, we have 220 MCQ single best answer questions sat over two days with all sections of the course examinable in this format. These questions range from basic science and clinical knowledge, to diagnosis and management on a variety of conditions. Therefore, it is not advisable to study in-depth on non-high yield topics and focus instead on breadth of knowledge and in-depth on common conditions identified by your respective schools of medicine.

Studying for the MCQs required time and a plethora of different resources. My main resources were as follows:

Get Through Medical School: 1100 SBAs/BOFs and EMQs

- Great for covering most areas of medicine and especially good for passing end-of-run exams
- Helps to guide study well and good for checking you have understood the major diseases and treatment options.

BMJ OnExamination's Question bank online

- Good to learn/revise public health and the eponymous syndromes from.
- More in-depth knowledge learning in this resource. Helpful to see what percentage you are getting right and whether you are at level you expect to be at.

PasTest's Online Question Bank

- Heard that this is great from those who used it.
- Apparently is very applicable and covers more topics than BMJ's OnExamination.

500 Single Best Answers in Medicine

- Incredibly good chapters on each specialty whether to prep for the run or to improve/revise your knowledge across specialty specific questions.

Any material (notes/lecture slides) from the faculty

- These are always the best educational resource and usually reflect the questions that will be asked. REMEMBER that your Consultants are the ones that set the questions and they may give many hints (not that you'll need them).

OSCEs:

There are 10 seven minute OSCE Stations with three explanation, three examination and four history taking stations. The OSCE is responsible for 60% of the overall pass mark and to pass a student must pass at least one examination, one history and one explanation station.

To pass the OSCE, you need to get out and meet patients and examine them as much as you can. Get your seniors to watch you do this so they can pick up your faults and remind what you missed. Make sure you don't pre-read the notes so the mystery of the diagnosis still remains for you. Patients also often don't have any idea what investigation or treatment is about to be done to them and this is your opportunity to explain the process to them.

Another necessary part of practice is an OSCE group (Start this as early as possible). It is much more than being able to power through numerous possible exams, history and explanation scenarios. It is also a forum to bring up questions and discuss difficult topics or concepts you may struggle with. The best book I have come across for preparing and practicing is: Talley and O'Connor's Clinical Examination, as it clearly explains both the examination process and the interpretation of common clinical findings. It also includes key tables and photos to present the information well for the visual learners. Remember to smile, build rapport and if you have no idea what they are asking about, stick to your structure – It will help you out of many difficult situations.

GENERAL TIPS

Exams such as these require knowledge over many subject areas, all of which you have been taught at different times over a lengthy period. My tip is to track your study progress and keep a checklist of what you have revised

and what you haven't. What I've done is split my checklist into learned and tested. This way you can learn the knowledge first and then test yourself using one of the earlier-named resources. If you do well enough you can tick it off, and may need to revisit it just before the exam to revise the high-yield points. This is especially handy a week before exams when there is no class. You can split your day into a-third of doing questions, a-third doing OSCEs and the final third discussing or quizzing mates on their weaknesses and vice versa. This is perfect for someone like myself who is horrible at learning lists, as I find it sticks much better and is also fun with others.

Clinical workload is something to be wary about coming into exams and plan your study around this. Note when your busier runs are scheduled in the year; and if they are later, plan your study a bit earlier so that you have enough time on the wards in the final runs and for personal study. This may be difficult because at the end-of-year study is foremost on your mind, remember that the run is for you to learn on and you won't need to revise it so close to exams.

FINAL TIP

Know what you are strong at and where your weakness lies. The aim is to not focus too much in your strong areas and neglect the others, but being reasonably knowledgeable across a broad range of topics. This is after all the most you may ever know about all of medicine generally.

Wellbeing is something to factor right in there above study. I find sleeping, exercising and social time or non-study time to be high on my list in adjunct to studying. Sleep is useful for many reasons- relaxation, re-energisation, resetting my brain and reinforcing concepts that wouldn't click into my head the night before. Exercising is mainly for the endorphins and combating those kilos of chocolate consumed, but for those of you keen enough, textbooks can fit onto treadmills and exercycles these days. Non-study time is all for mental health. Face it, you can't survive without friends and the outside world, so it's best to not ignore them. Meet up and discuss things. Relax in their company.

The final word is: Keep healthy, look after yourselves and remember; it's only another test!

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