

# If in doubt – take leave

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Daphne Cohen is a PGY1 house officer at MidCentral DHB. She has lived and studied in most of NZ's major cities and managed to pick up a PGDip in Bioethics along the way. Her major interests include General Medicine, social justice, and brunch. She also has amazing hair. She is this year's blogger for the NZMSA First Year blog. Find more at <http://www.nzmsa.org.nz/category/thefirstyear/>

There are a lot of hard things about the first year as a doctor. Mostly it's not the medicine itself, but the job – getting used to how the hospital is run, learning to read your consultant's mind, dealing with the long days, the early starts and the late finishes. Whether it's horrible nightmares about the hospital or finding that your mid-week alcohol consumption is just slooowly creeping up (don't worry, I'm still under the recommended weekly limit), it seems like around about this time of year everyone is struggling. Facebook posts become a lot less inspiring and tend to feature more crying, despair and/or anger. It doesn't help that the weather is getting cold and wet either.

General Surgery seems to be the worst run for making people cry, wonder why they did medicine in the first place and generally doubt their competence, but it can happen in any run. When (not if) it does happen it can seem overwhelming, but the good news is that most people manage to make it through without collapsing into a pathetic heap. Here are a few tips:

### Take leave:

I'm writing this post after a two week trip to the US, including a week on Maui doing nothing but lying on the beach and drinking Mai Tais – it was amazing, and I definitely needed it. Compared to many other professions we get a lot of leave and a pretty decent salary, so use it! Try and take some leave every run and more in the difficult ones if necessary. Just remember that you need to complete at least 10 weeks of every 13 week run to get registration – so don't take more than three weeks (15 days) off including sick leave. If you do nothing else on this list, take leave.

### Talk to people:

You may be the strong silent type, but trust me it helps to talk to someone. It can be your flatmates, family members, non-med friends or co-workers. Some of the most cathartic venting I've had has been over a glass of wine with other PGY1s – they've been there and they get it, plus you can provide a sympathetic ear for their own rants. You can also talk to your intern supervisor, registrar or consultant if you're struggling and need help – they are a great resource.

### Exercise, meditation, sleep, socialising etc:

All that good stuff. You've had lectures on it and read about it in the various wellbeing guides – it really works. Do it. Prevention is better than cure, and if you can get into a habit of exercise or meditation, find a sleep schedule that lets you compensate for the long days, and make time for your friends and family you will find it much easier to cope with the stress. You need to prioritise yourself once in a while.

The NZMSA produces a great guide with lots of advice for improving wellbeing. You might not feel like you need it right now, but hold on to it.

In the dark moments that may await you in the future, just remember: you are not a bad doctor. Yes, you're young and inexperienced. You will make mistakes, but they won't be serious ones (unless you're spectacularly unlucky). You made it through six years of med school, you passed all those exams and assessments, and you did all that study and work.

You got this.