"Probably the most humbling part of the day was the reason each student gave for applying to medicine."

Remembering me then

I recently volunteered to help with a day of mock interviews for aspiring medical students. The workshop was run for sixth-form students from deprived backgrounds by Teach First (<http://www.teachfirst.org.uk>), an independent educational charity. Teach First believe that no child's educational success should be limited by their socioeconomic background and they work in schools where the majority of pupils come from the poorest families in the country. They also aim to inspire pupils to be more informed and ambitious in their post-18 choices via the Higher Education Access Programme for Schools (HEAPS), and this interview workshop was part of that aim. Coming from a family of teachers, I've always known I don't have the guts, patience, or super-human resilience to work in today's schools, but I had heard fantastic things about the Teach First programme and jumped at the opportunity when they asked me to be involved.

What followed was a truly inspirational day. The students I met were invariably enthusiastic, engaging, and well informed. Most were nervous, some lacked confidence, but they all had fantastic stories to tell. They gave intelligent, thoughtful answers to even my most gruelling questioning and drew on varied and moving life experiences in their responses, despite their relatively young age. They were far better informed about issues facing the NHS and current advances in medical science than I ever was at that stage (and perhaps, ashamedly, than I am today), and they expressed their views eloquently and passionately. They had gone to great trouble to arrange a wide variety of relevant work experience as well as being often one of only a few students in their classes who were achieving academically. At the end of the day, when we were feeding back to the students and I wished them well in their interviews, it couldn't have been more heartfelt; we need these talented young people in medicine.

What was probably the most humbling part of the day though was the reason each student gave for applying to medicine. Whether it was a personal interaction with a truly inspirational doctor, or that age-old cliché of 'wanting to help people', their answers really moved me. They also prompted me to root out my own medical

application form from all those years ago, which I found at the bottom of a pile of dusty papers and made for surprisingly emotional reading. I spoke of medicine as a career that I would be 'delighted and privileged to be a part of,' and my aspiration to become a doctor of the highest calibre. I'm certainly not there yet, but reminding myself of who that 16-year-old school girl wanted to be, and why, certainly made me think.

I wrote that I was excited about 'continual learning', 'embracing change', and 'giving something back'. I saw the chance to interact with all types of people when they most needed help and compassion as a 'unique opportunity'. I was certainly naïve, inexperienced, and idealistic, but surely these very sentiments could not be more applicable now, even to a somewhat cynical, worn out, and world-weary trainee!

I would argue we should all spend a moment and try and think back to our former selves, before the ravages of daily grind in the NHS took hold, and remember why we're here. Why we should be striving for excellence, and why we worked so hard for all these years to get here. Yes, I cringed a little when I read about my romanticised impression of what a medical career would be, and yes, despite the pages of 'relevant work experience' I had, I still had absolutely no idea about the realities of the job. However, despite that, a copy of that application form is now sat in my desk drawer at work, to be rooted out after those heartsink moments during a Monday morning clinic when I'm feeling particularly jaded. I'm proud of that 16-year-old girl and her dreams; we're not the same person anymore, but I'm sure there's a lot I can learn from her. And hopefully, remembering me then, will help make me a better, more compassionate doctor now.

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