Medicine is a demanding career. It is a field that requires intense schooling, constant training and has a chaotic schedule. In the early years as a student, you are always preparing for quizzes and exams. You can never say you have finished learning.

As an intern, you are a headless chicken trying to figure out stuff and yourself – confidence takes a huge beating. That sense of accomplishment of completing medical school is just washed away. As time goes by, you get used to having short or no lunch breaks, your body clock gets messed up with the calls, your love for caffeine increases exponentially and your social life takes a downward dive.

After internship, you have more responsibilities. You venture through more rotations or may be one of the lucky ones who knows what they want to specialise in and enter a training program.

You now try to manage work, life and training. Some may stumble, and some may not, as they juggle this for the next few years.
The beauty of the journey

When I decided to become a doctor, I didn’t realise what I was getting into. But now knowing what I know, as a teen I would still have chosen this path.

Though there is a lot of craziness as we go along this journey, there is also a lot of joy. During the medical school entrance interview, I was asked “Why medicine?” My reply was that I wanted to help people. Today I would have replied it very differently. Yes, I still want to help people but there are a lot of things this career did for me. It took me on a self-discovery journey.

Medicine taught me about compassion, kindness, humanity, vulnerability, hope and scepticism. Within a day, it could and still does rock my emotions from feeling self-equipped to self-doubt. I get to witness very personal and raw human interactions.

As a medical student, I learned the science first followed by the methodical approach to a patient via history taking and examination. With the first encounters of seeing patients, I began to realise that medicine is complicated. It is not as black and white as you read in the books. While there is something to learn from every patient and every story, the takeaways are not so neat and tidy anymore. Lessons like “we need to spend more time listening to our patients” and “there are systemic challenges facing medicine” felt too shallow—the limitations of what we can do to alleviate pain and suffering are all too real, and all too frightening.

During internship, time and time again you face the reality that medicine can be messy. Internship is draining mentally and physically. There is a huge leap from being a medical student to an intern—the first steps towards clinical independence.

You are also at the start of this hierarchal system. You see behaviours that you never want to learn and at the same time come across role models. I learnt a lot about support. Though it was an exhausting year, I had enjoyed my internship. I have made some lifelong friends and gained a lot of knowledge from my internship year.
I learnt what it meant to be part of a team and how the leadership of a team can affect the morale of the team. Morale can impact the professional and personal lives of individuals. A kind and compassionate head can create a safe, open environment in which the team can discuss issues, learn and try things for themselves. Also anger, narcissism and being a bully are never a good mix.

By the end of internship, I was better at coping. I realise the days that were most overwhelming, a good laugh or an encouraging word from a friend or colleague got me through. I also came to appreciate medicine and found it can be very rewarding.

A few years later, the fear of mistakes and apprehension became less, and the confidence grew. Especially when you make the right diagnosis, prescribe the correct treatment and the patient gets better. It really feels good. For myself, I got to see this most in primary care and emergency, and this is what attracted me to urgent care—my current training.

Also, my mentors, came from both these fields. They provided me with guidance, support and encouragement which eventually had a role to play in the training program I chose. I admired their passion for their speciality, the compassion they showed their patients and the respect they had for their colleagues. I also appreciated the manner they took everything at stride.

As I am coming to the last moments in my training program, I know I will never stop learning and acknowledge that you can never be fully prepared. Medicine is a field that will keep you on your toes, with each day bringing the unexpected. Because you can’t possibly prepare for every potential scenario, your ability to think on your feet and act accordingly under pressure will serve you well.

Medicine keeps me humble, has taught me to always look at the silver lining and to be compassionate. So, if I was asked again “Why medicine?”, my reply would be “Why not?”