

Welcome Pembroke Medics 2011!

A massive congratulations and welcome to the best subject at the best college in Cambridge! (Arguably the best uni in the world!)

My name is Charlotte and I'm about to start second year medicine at Pembroke. I'm also your subject rep for the year, which means I'm your official point of contact and you can come to me at any time with questions, problems or just general chat about medicine (or really anything if you wish). I'm guessing many of you may be feeling quite overwhelmed right now - anxious, curious, hopefully excited and maybe even a little confused about everything. So I hope this brief intro will help to allay some fears and answer some questions you have.



One of the commonest fears coming to Cambridge is whether you'll be as good as everyone else and how you'll cope with the work. It is true that medicine is a demanding subject, but I can reassure you all that you are all capable of doing really well here and having a brilliant time. The interviewers know what they're doing when picking people, so trust them! You have to be willing to work and it is a step up from school, but remember everyone is in the same boat and just because somebody else looks perfect, doesn't mean they're not secretly struggling too! I've also found Pembroke to be an incredibly warm and welcoming place to live and work – there is always a friendly face about and someone to chat to. A big advantage of medicine too is that the large number of contact hours makes it really easy to meet new people and make friends very quickly. Through supervisions and practicals you get to work with students from both Pembroke and other colleges every week which is lovely and it is a sociable subject, with various medic events throughout the year.

I'm sure you've already been told this, but I'll give you a brief course outline. You study 3 main subjects for the whole year – FAB (anatomy), HOM (physiology) and MiMS (biochemistry) – plus 3 smaller units - ISBM (statistics) and SCHI (sociology), with exams at the end of Lent term and PfP (Preparing for Patients) with one piece of coursework. The first 3 will take up most of your time and involve a weekly supervision in college for each, with an expert. The others involve much less work, although we do have ISBM supervisions in Pembroke. In addition to supervisions, you can expect to have around 10 lectures, 4 hours of dissection and 2 hours of practicals per week, though this varies. For example, twice a year you will visit a GP surgery to meet patients for the PfP course, a fun break from the normal timetable. There are a lot of hours and it does mean 9am starts most days, but look on the bright side – you could be a NatSci and have Saturday lectures! It can also help you organise your time – there's a much more independent learning style at university so having many hours organised for you is helpful!

An important question for many people is how much work there is. I would be lying if I said there was not much work – you have to be willing put in the effort at Cambridge, but then again that's probably a reason why you're coming here. You

will be set essays or questions by supervisors most weeks and you can expect an average of around 2 long essays (4 A4 sides) and maybe an extra work sheet per week. Another quirk of college – they like everything to be hand-written, in preparation for exams. In addition, it is very wise to read over/read ahead for lectures and practicals. This is particularly important for dissection, as you are expected to have prepared for each session and you will not cover the work again (except in a 1hr supervision, which isn't long enough to cover everything) – anatomy is largely self-taught here. It's a big mistake to wait until half way through Michaelmas term before deciding to start trying to learn things. The earlier you get into the habit of reading over everything each day, the easier and less stressful it will be come exam term. You will really thank yourself for putting in the extra hours at the start of the year!

All that said, studying medicine here is REALLY good fun and there's certainly time to have a life outside studying. I have really enjoyed studying subjects specifically geared towards medicine and not just generic sciences. My personal favourite is anatomy and dissection – incredibly hands-on and interesting – but of course this varies between students. And there are hundreds of societies, clubs and outside activities to get involved with. In the first two terms I generally found time for societies 2 nights per week and going out maybe one or two other evenings, plus I had a few Saturdays off for visiting family etc. Other medics have done more. Work increases in exam term with revision (though timetabled hours decrease) but all the work is worth it when you reach May Week. So you should definitely be looking forward to arriving here and not dreading it!

Finally, I'll say a little about preparation work. I remember answering a series of science and maths questions from the 'prospective students' website last summer - don't worry about doing this perfectly as nobody will ever check it. Similarly, don't try to read every recommended book from cover to cover – they are there for interest only. You are advised to revise your school-level sciences, but there are mixed views on how helpful this is as much of it isn't relevant. It's probably best to spend a little time going over some of it, using the list of questions as a guide of topics, as it will get you in the frame of mind of working again and some of it will be helpful.

Something I would highly recommend to anyone who hasn't done A-level physics is to spend a little time re-revising the basics in GCSE and possibly even getting hold of some A-level standard info and reading through it. I really struggled with physiology in the first term because they expect you to be fairly confident with basic physics concepts and I barely remembered the difference between voltage and current!

Overall the best preparation is to stay calm and look forward to coming to Pembroke – you're going to have the time of your life! I really look forward to meeting you all in October, and in the meantime if you have any questions or concerns (however silly they seem) then feel free to email me.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

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