

Musings of a Fellow Gosumec

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Learning basically is first to dissociate followed by an act of association. Let's take the subject English language for example. We first learn to differentiate the twenty-six letters. Please note that at this stage there is understanding at a very superficial level even if there is one. Also it is considered mandatory to be aware of this differentiation at that stage as through life later. At a later stage in life you realize the similarities between letters and that the distinction is just a working knowledge. Similarly in anatomy, every term is equivalent to a letter of the English alphabet. What letters are to English, terms are to anatomy. If English language is a combination of letters to be expressed meaningfully, anatomy is a combination of terms expressed meaningfully to form the very foundation of medicine.

Students coming into medicine from different non-English media as also from English background, can take solace from the fact that the fountainhead of medical terminology is Greek and Latin, both in turn being rooted in Sanskrit and various other ancient languages. The phrase "Everything is Greek and Latin" is understood as that which is incomprehensible. Medicine in general and anatomy in particular are all Greek and Latin. The layman (literally meaning an idiot) finds it difficult to comprehend the Greek and Latin mumbo-jumbo. This incomprehension by the layman creates an aura around the physician. An example here is worthwhile. A doctor telling his or her patient that he or she has inflammation of the vertebral column as opposed to another saying spondylitis, though both have said the same thing, the latter is supposedly adored for speaking in a language the layman does not understand.

While learning the letters of the English alphabet the human mind is not mature enough to go into the depths of analysis. While learning medical terms however the maturity is definitely adequate enough to permit a spirit of enquiry. To take an example, when you learnt the letter "A" you were not in a position to ask why "A" is "A" but now when you are learning Biceps you definitely have the maturity to understand "Bi" means two and "ceps" means heads, however the fundamental why "B" is "B" still eludes you. This simply means that even a lifetime's study of, say, English cannot help you master it. This sort of an analytical study makes you take a few more steps than another who has just taken one step, that of just knowing the term. Forget what everybody does, but the one who has traveled intellectually a little further than the rest is likely to be conscious of the initial steps.

This brings us to memory, a storehouse (-ry = aggregate) of information. Interest and memory tend to be polar opposites. What you are interested in need not be memorized and vice versa. So we could as well say that to determine your field of interest the approach adopted could be as follows: The subject which registers naturally with you without any attempt to memorize is the area of your interest. At a younger age, say, while learning English and mathematics you did not have an option but to memorize the letters and numbers. But now when you are in a professional course you definitely have a wiser option of not to memorize but to comprehend.

A feeling that you have to know everything in anatomy in a year, or a year and a half or two stands modified with the example quoted above that you cannot master English or any language even in a lifetime. However you can gather certain general principles, which can guide your usage of English rather thoroughly in your lifetime. Similarly in anatomy you can learn the general principles which themselves change and you will be surprised to realize that even in one's academic journey, change is the only constant feature. Hence at any stage, specifications are to be learnt and accepted with the proverbial pinch of salt.

When it comes to competition, merit etc. do not forget that your final destination is not a routine theory or practical examination but comprehending a seeming puzzle faced by a fellow Homo

sapiens. The task of alleviating a disease may be achieved either without any knowledge of medicine altogether (as is done by the so-called quacks), or by a thorough understanding of the situation. At times, despite the latter you may draw a blank, but as long as your efforts are sincere and sustained you do not have to bother about the outcome. Self may be viewed as an acronym implying Sincere/Sustained Effort Lasting Forever.

Summarizing, even if you comprehend one word a day (I am sure you can do much more than this) you would be advancing at a rate of minimum 365/6 words a year and then there is no looking back. Even a pessimist's statement that you learn only to unlearn will not deter you. As far as earning is concerned, with your comprehension you will score over it positively. Mind you, we have not gone into phonetics here, which in itself is a mind-boggling subject.

Let's expand S.G.S.M.C. as Several Great Souls Medical College and K.E.M.H. as Keen Every Moment Hospital (Pardon me for not considering VII between Every and Moment).

I would like to thank the Anatomy Department for requesting me to pen down a few words for the Handbook of the Department. While parting, allow me to end with the word "confusion", about which we all tend to be worried. The term means "jointed together" so when you see many things at the same time and are neither clear nor confident about any of the things seen, such a state of mind is best described as confusion. I would go a step further to say that if you are clear on an issue it means that there is still some direction/angle you have not considered. You cannot be clear without temporarily being "confused" and hence stop worrying about confusion.