

PURE BLISS FOR LIFE!

Sinead Ramjit

Having completed one term in Trinity College, I am sure we can all agree on one thing – Trinity College is full of fun activities, and the medical school is no exception! Just look at our version of the amusement park so keenly constructed by the School of Medicine. From a distance, especially during our introduction to the dissecting lab, we all thought, “Wow! What great fun lies ahead!”

But as time passed, we came to realise that the ‘Ferris wheel’ was actually that deadly ‘cell cycle’, that those ‘roller coasters’ were really repeated inhibitory and excitatory curves of membrane potentials and those ‘humerus’ clowns were colour coded for a reason. What gave us that sigh of relief was stumbling upon the Ice-Cream shop just outside the park with the sign “PBL”. There was no mistake about it; this was the best part of the construction, creating no illusion, but a 100% guarantee of **“Pure Bliss for Life!”**

Whether you sat in that room hoping that if you stare enough at the clock- somehow two hours would magically slip by - or if your tutor so selfishly stole 75% of the session, only keeping you there for half an hour; whether you arduously participated in every point or slept with your eyes opened throughout the entire thing; whether you had every idea about what was happening in the class or if you didn’t have a clue; whether you were one of those privileged to have a primary degree belting out the Biochemistry that left the others in shock or if you were one of us fresh out of school feeling as

dumb as bricks when the aforementioned event occurred; we all were hoping to receive some pure bliss (and knowledge) for life.

Whatever your position during those PBL (Problem Based Learning) sessions, one thing was certain - it definitely added colour to your timetable. Where else could you have found such a laid back setting that kept you continuously cognitively active? A place where learning was made fun, where students taught students (with inept drawings of the NMJ), where everyone moved at a comfortable pace and where we were all on the same page (literally in some cases, when we had all brought ‘Sherwoods’ as research). No other class would cause our imagination to stretch so far as to find ways to disguise hangovers from Alchemy Mondays or Twenty One’s Thursdays.

PBL was one of those sessions that you prepped all your information for, but only got a chance to squeeze in 13.4% of it because you were too shy to say something. Some of us were ‘lucky’ enough to get more than expected into the session, as the chairperson so kindly drew you into the discussion. It really broke some

“PBL groups were the foundation of many of the close-knitted friendships that exist today within the class of 2015.”

of us out of the shells of secondary school that we were accustomed to. PBL taught us how to guide our own discussions and sometimes healthy, luke-warm debates, only being steered back on to the right track by our tutors if we derailed to discuss an interesting movie or amusing real-life situation related to the scenario, still convincing ourselves that we were on target. PBL rooms were where we flourished most. It was where we got the chance to help and be helped by our peers. They were where all the lectures finally made sense and we got to genuinely say “Oh! So THAT’S what Dr. X was trying to explain last Thursday?!”

PBL groups were the foundations of many of the close-knitted friendships that exist today within the class of 2015. These friendships were not only forged among students, but also between the tutors and students. Many tutors made this experience all the more fun with their personalities and patience to sustain two hours of clueless medical students rambling on about everything which we knew nothing about. But have you ever wondered what happens in the life of a tutor outside of those 8 hours? What do you think they’re up to? Well, you’re about to find out about one tutor in particular, who you voted to be the best PBL tutor – Neil Fleming!

I caught up with Neil and asked him a few questions, both related and unrelated to PBL that I thought would be very interesting to share with the Trinity community. So here goes...“The Neil Deal!” By just looking at him, you would not even remotely guess some of the things that this ‘PBL Legend’ has been up to in his

past. Apart from being the Junior World Champion in Kayaking, did you know that Neil was a member of a band, playing guitar and singing traditional Irish music in pubs around his home county of Kildare? But Mr. Fleming has no limits he says – he listens to all genres of music, but admits going through ‘phases’ when he was younger, having “hair down to here (pointing to his waist) and listening to nothing but heavy metal.” But don’t think for a second that his ‘wild side’ stops there. Neil once “streaked naked through the Physiology department and was caught on security cameras,” saying that ‘nakedness’ was a recurring theme for him on campus back in the day. Believe it or not however, this ‘dare devil’ with a passion for life also has arachnophobia –attributing his condition to that fateful incident involving a bath tub, an old house, Cork and again, nakedness.

“[Problem Based Learning] promotes group learning and effective communication which is vital [in] the work environment”
Neil Fleming, PBL Tutor

Although “late, disorganised and forgetful” are three adjectives, Neil admits, that are most commonly used to refer to him, he claims that these characteristics do not affect his PBL sessions. He takes his role as a tutor very seriously, and had some advice to share with medical students. In essence- “Don’t skip PBL; try to look at the bigger picture while you’re studying – Link the Anatomy, Physiology and Biochemistry; relax more – But don’t have an ‘I couldn’t care less’ attitude”. Neil further emphasises the importance of PBL, admitting that he wished he had PBL while pursuing his course. He went on to say that this aspect of the programme, even if you do not learn anything ‘scientific’ for the entire year, promotes group learning and effective communication which

Pure Bliss for Life!

is vital for when you actually get into the work environment - as he aptly stated "No doctor knows everything!" (I just might borrow that line for exams once in a while.) PBL also allows you to gauge the academic dynamics of the rest of the class in relation to yourself – if you know enough information, if you're studying the right things, if you need to improve on your research skills or even if you just need that boost in

confidence to voice your opinion. All in all, even though you may not realise it, PBL moulds everyone to become a better doctor.

So go forth in good faith Med students! We're all working together to create a better future';';. You know it's worth it. But don't forget to enjoy life to the fullest, it is full of surprises - Dare I say to all you PBL-ers, "Acute Leukaemia"?!



About the Author:

Hailing to you from the Caribbean is the one and only Sinead Ramjit! In the true spirit of becoming a successful doctor, Sinead is described by her Irish friends as 'literally bringing the warmth of Trinidad & Tobago to Ireland in her smile and laughter' and more often than not 'bringing the smell of the Anatomy Lab to Trinity Halls!' This first year medical student is a talented musician and artist, and the only thing more important to her than oxygen in her alveoli is (ethanol in her veins! I mean...) the love of her friends, family and God.



The Anatomy Lecture Theatre