

Ten things I learned at the BCMA this summer

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I learned a lot during my first year of medical school. Some things I've already forgotten, like the life cycle of *Ascaris lumbricoides* (something to do with the lungs?). Some things were repeated so many times that they are now drilled into my subconscious, such as, kidney stone + fever = sepsis = EMERGENCY. Some were so startling that I'm sure never to forget them; discovering that our abdominal contents have their own "beard," known as the *greater omentum*, completely knocked my socks off.

This summer, I embarked on a new challenge—an 8-week medical student internship at the BCMA. While most of my classmates have been off gallivanting around Europe or poring over lab results in the name of CARMS-boosting research, two of us newly minted second-year students have been wandering the halls of the BCMA learning all about the other side of medicine. Medical school is so focused on anatomy, physiology, and pathology—understandably, as there is a lot to learn—that most new medical graduates know virtually nothing about the business of being a doctor. The past 8 weeks were an eye-opening experience and taught me things that will likely prove just as useful as my carefully memorized knowledge of the blood clotting cascade. Here are the top 10 things I learned while working at the BCMA this summer.

1. Physicians, as a profession, are incredibly fortunate to have such a talented and dedicated group of people working in their interests. Everyone I've met at the BCMA has been intelligent, professional, and welcoming, and has seemed to genuinely enjoy what

This article has been peer reviewed.

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they do. And I'm not just saying that to suck up to my (now-former) boss.

2. There are a huge number of resources available to physicians and physicians-in-training, most of which I was unaware of. From health and disability insurance to Whitecaps and Canucks tickets, the BCMA offers its members a plethora of services and discounts. I'll definitely be taking advantage of this next time I feel like catching a game!

3. There are committees, programs, and groups for everything. And every committee/program/group has an acronym. GPSC, SSC, PSP, SCC, SSPS, SGP, CHARD, PITO—it can be a bit overwhelming for a newcomer.

4. Much like the clinical side of this profession, the business of being a doctor is constantly evolving to keep up with our province's health care needs. The BCMA is always rolling out new initiatives and policies to help physicians provide better health care for British Columbians. Even in my short stay, I witnessed a lot of changes and new beginnings.

5. The food here alone is enough to make me committed to being involved in the BCMA in future as a practising physician. Practically every day there are leftover goodies from a catered lunchtime physician meeting (of one of the above-mentioned alphabet committees); plus, there is cake every time it's someone's birthday. Enough said.

6. Physicians are a powerful group. Needless to say, there has been a lot of negotiation drama around here, and things have been a little tense at times. But I've been reminded time and time again that the BCMA is the most powerful non-union there is. It can be challenging to get physicians to agree on something and act cohesively, but when they do, watch out.

7. Real work clothes, although not *quite* as comfortable as stretchy yoga



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pants, do make me look (and feel) a lot more professional. I hate to admit it, but I kind of enjoyed getting dressed up for work every morning. But only a little bit—I'll be back to my standard Lululemon-and-running-shoes uniform once classes start in September.

8. Part of my work involved a project on physician health, so I learned a lot about how doctors meet (or fail to meet) their own health care needs. I learned that docs need to eat better, move more, stress less, sleep more, and make time to take care of themselves—just like everybody else. Just because they're physicians doesn't mean they're invincible.

9. When it's 15 degrees and cloudy outside (remember July?), air conditioning is both unnecessary and uncomfortable. I spent most of my days wrapped in a fleece blanket and a scarf with a space heater at my feet. Clearly I will have to pick a specialty that caters to my perpetual coldness. Tropical medicine, perhaps? Sounds nice and warm.

10. Sure, there are problems with our health care system—but there are a lot of great things too. Great people, great programs, great visions for the future. Looking at health care systems in other places across the world really emphasized how lucky we are in BC to have a strong system, and why it's so important that we work hard to keep it that way.