

# The transition from high school to university: a medical student's perspective

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## Dear editor

As medical students from the University of Manchester, we read the study by Siri et al<sup>1</sup> with great interest. We believe that the issue raised in this study is of exceptional significance and agree that the transition phase is an important and challenging chapter in one's life. The move from high school to university life is a difficult one and students must adapt to changes in the style of learning required, adopt financial responsibility, and develop social and personal independence. Struggling in any one of these aspects can influence student experience and potentially prevent students from progressing on the course and may lead to them dropping out of university. It is therefore important that the transition phase is given more attention and targeted with additional support such as the *Cursos Probatorios de Ingreso* ("preparatory courses for admission") in Paraguay.<sup>1</sup>

As students from a UK university with a significantly lower dropout rate (5%–6%)<sup>2</sup> in comparison to the 57.5% in Latin America, we have identified a number of elements that we found useful in preparing for the transition phase. As highlighted by Siri et al,<sup>1</sup> high school teachers are keen to be involved in the preparation for the transition phase. In the UK, some high schools organize and deliver additional extracurricular career sessions that provide students with individualized advice about getting into and preparing for university. Some of the themes covered include: what to expect at university, self-directed learning, financial planning, and moving away from home. In addition, we were privileged to have had current medical students visit the high school to provide their perspective and advice on effectively managing the transition phase along with a more realistic view of the course. This much-needed and valuable insight helped students to determine whether medicine was right for them and from our personal experience, we feel this was effective in helping to bridge the gap.

The Manchester Access Programme,<sup>3</sup> a scheme delivered by the University of Manchester, aims to identify those who are underprivileged and therefore at an increased risk of dropping out and provides additional support in preparation for university. As part of the program, each student is required to undertake a supervisor-guided project and write a university-style essay, thus preparing them to cope with additional workloads and manage their own time and learning, as would be expected of a university student. The financial burden of attending university is also addressed by the Manchester Access Programme through the provision of an annual grant for those eligible. Advice is given on key aspects of university life such as living arrangements and integrating at university, while introducing students to potential peers.

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As discussed earlier, it is undeniably important for students to be prepared for the transition; however, it is also crucial that once at university a smooth transition is maintained and continued support is available, thereby reducing dropout rates. Throughout our years at Manchester Medical School, we have identified a number of strategies that we have found to be useful and exceptionally supportive. Each student is assigned a tutor with whom they meet regularly to discuss any issues or concerns that they may have. This allows the tutor to identify any students who are struggling and to provide early intervention, hence reducing the likelihood of dropout. In addition to tutor support, each student is also allocated two mentors from senior years who assist in social integration and act as a port of call. In our experience, peer support provides accessible informal advice on any aspect of student life. This is further reinforced by the study conducted by Siri et al,<sup>1</sup> which states that students prefer to obtain information from their peers or other students.

To conclude, it is evident that a successful transition is vital in reducing the likelihood of students dropping out of

university. From our experience, we believe that this can be performed through both adequate preparation for the transition phase while at high school and continued support once at university. We hope that this insight proves useful when considering how to address the transition phase when aiming to reduce dropout rates.

## Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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