

Surviving and thriving in your surgical rotations – Part 1: On the Surgical Ward

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Rewa Keegan is a general surgeon. She completed her intern and resident years at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and commenced general surgical training in 2010, successfully gaining her fellowship in 2014. Rewa loves clinical teaching from a medical student to registrar level, particularly in the areas of surgical simulation and working with aspiring surgeons on developing their career plans. Rewa is very interested in surgical education, and has undertaken a number of research projects looking at how registrars perceive their experience in surgical training. Rewa plans to undertake further training in oncoplastic breast surgery and she and her husband ultimately plan to settle in a regional coastal centre after completing fellowships overseas.

Tips for your first surgical rotation

Starting your first surgical rotation can be daunting, with so many unknowns on the ward and in the operating theatres. Below are a few hints and tips gathered over the years by a general surgeon who still remembers what it was like to be a surgical intern. These tips should ensure you get the most out of your surgical term and your surgical team gets the most out of you!

1. If in doubt always alert your senior (or someone senior)

If something is going not so well with a patient, regardless of how trivial it may seem, TELL SOMEONE SENIOR. This is usually your registrar, but sometimes you may need to let the boss know directly. If you DON'T tell someone, then it is almost guaranteed things will go pear-shaped and you will look and feel bad!

2. Never, ever, ever lie

If you don't know a result, don't make it up. If you forgot to order that CT, fess up. Lying (even a tiny white lie) is always a terrible idea and will almost always backfire. Just remember that [everyone makes mistakes](#) and the best thing you can do about them is to be honest!

3. Be at work on time every day, prepared and eager with a smile on your face

If you can get there before your registrar, print off a list, get a quick handover from the evening nurses and have the notes ready to go for your round, you will be a very successful intern.

4. Carry your essentials at all times and be ORGANISED!

Make sure your pager, stethoscope, ID and multiple pens are on your body at all times.

Carry a stash of important papers (blank consent forms, radiology/pathology/PET request forms) with you in a small folder, preferably one with a clip on the front you can attach your patient list to. This saves SO much time compared to going back and forth to the nursing station during rounds, especially when you are on an unfamiliar ward.

Keep important contacts either in paper form or stored in your phone so you can call people easily from anywhere (think theatres, radiology, pathology, common wards you visit, registrars from your team and frequently consulted specialties etc).

Important tip: Learn how to learn from your patients

Go through patient's scans, try to work out the diagnosis from the imaging and history by yourself not simply accept the provisional diagnosis if the patient was admitted through emergency.

Read Part 2 of this blog here: [Surviving and thriving in your surgical rotations: Part 2 - In Operating Theatres](#)

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