

REMINISCING ON NATIONAL SERVICE

After our commissioning, we each went our separate ways, having been posted to different units for the remainder of our National Service (NS). In my case, it was for one year and five months, almost the equivalent of three postings of the medical officers (MOs) posting exercise! I was put in charge of a military medical centre, which meant that I ran an entire medical centre with the assistance of medics and support staff.

As the MO-in-charge, I had to run clinics every day, and manage and train full-time National Servicemen (NSF) medics to ensure the smooth running of the medical centre. I also picked up useful administrative skills such as inventory management, event organisation and investigation report writing. I realised that the practice of effective medicine is not just purely clinical but also requires solid administration, infrastructure and standard operating procedures to ensure that all objectives are met in a holistic fashion.

However, the military MO's practice is sometimes a thankless task. Servicemen may present with an astonishing myriad of problems, and it can be challenging to manage these issues all at once. Servicemen and their parents are also increasingly demanding on medical management, which adds a tremendous amount of stress on MOs. We also have to assess the servicemen to determine their physical employment status and suitability for training activities. Occasionally, servicemen's expectations can be far removed from reality and NS requirements. Nevertheless, we try our best to moderate expectations and find an acceptable solution for all parties involved.

One memorable NS experience was in dealing with a serviceman afflicted with hidradenitis suppurativa (HS). He was having a particularly bad flare, which impaired his ability to perform simple tasks. He was thus viewed negatively and subjected to workplace bullying. Psychologically, it affected him significantly and resulted in poor performance and commitment to NS. When I first saw him, I felt that he needed help to break out of this vicious cycle. I treated him with appropriate courses of antibiotics and referred him to the National Skin Centre for follow-up. I also sought to change his vocation and workplace such that he was allowed minor but helpful concessions for his medical condition. His HS flares were reduced significantly and he was able to continue serving NS in a meaningful fashion.

Having returned to civilian practice, I recognise that the public's perception of NSF MOs is sometimes a little skewed due to what they read on social media. But these MOs and residents have deferred their hospital training and practices to fulfil their duty to the country and to care for their fellow countrymen. I wish to encourage my NSF colleagues to never lose heart and to strive towards even higher standards of medical practice to uphold the institution of NS. ◆

PROFILE



TEXT BY

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Legend

1. My very own batch, the 77th Medical Officer Cadet Course Centurions!



Photo:
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