“Rats”

By James Brown

Alright, let’s rewind to Halloween. Did everyone enjoy their All Halloows Eve festivities? I know I did. I started by cheering Iowa on to their “decisive” victory over Indiana. This involved screaming myself hoarse, eventually cursing Ricky Stanzi (and his mother) to an eternity of fiery torment. But I rallied, and by 8 PM I was ready to hit up a costume party extravaganza. And <dramatic gasp> you’ll never guess what I saw. My friends, my classmates, they were drinking alcohol and dancing! In such provocative costumes! Surely there is an Honor Code violation to be found in this depraved behavior. Now I’m tortured by this knowledge, these images. Shall I report my classmates? Shall I serve my civic duties and bring the full force of OSAC authority down on their degenerate heads?

By Dennis Anthony Porto

“Medical research is like trying to assemble a raft while floating in the middle of the ocean.” Such was the forewarning of my undergraduate mentor as I joined my first biomedical lab. He accurately preempted the trials of running and rerunning gels and trying to reconcile contradictory results. However, there was another layer of insight in my mentor’s simile that I had not considered.

Each of us is immersed in medicine—not only as students or faculty at a renowned medical school, but as individuals in a world made up of delicate and interconnected biological systems. As the H1N1 virus mutates and evolves, vaccine researchers work tirelessly to ward off a third outbreak. Meanwhile, hospitals brace for a possible influx of flu patients and Congress drafts increasingly tangled health care legislation.

Interdisciplinary Group Aims for Medical Innovation

By Tyler Rasmussen

The Iowa Medical Innovation Group (IMIG) is a new interdisciplinary student group that aims to invent new medical devices and models of healthcare delivery. While the invention of a novel surgical device is the primary goal for the inaugural year, the group is focused on creating an educational experience in which members from each college can learn about different aspects of the medical innovation process. The educational experience has been enhanced by didactic speakers that included a patent attorney, a quality control engineer, a member of the University of Iowa Research Foundation, a venture capitalist, and doctors.

The group took shape this past spring when Thomas Waterbury, M2 and Tyler Rasmussen, M2 began to identify faculty mentors in the colleges of medicine, law, engineering, and business. Faculty members were enthused and soon IMIG had 2-3 students from each college willing to participate.

The group began weekly meetings this fall and quickly started to identify clinical deficiencies by observing surgeries and holding discussions with University of Iowa physicians. The group manifested 25 clinical devices or solutions to clinical problems. IMIG members then spent a few weeks performing prior art searches in order to eliminate any devices that would violate filed patents. The group has recently narrowed its scope to three devices and is in the process of gathering more information about prior art, medical research, engineering feasibility, and market analysis.

In the coming months, the group will build a prototype of one of the devices. The medical and engineering students will combine powers to create a prototype that is cheap, efficient, and clinically useful. The law students will compile information for the filing of a provisional patent for the device. The business students will complete their market analysis and finish the semester with a business plan for the device.

The first year of medical innovation has been a success and the group will be expanding next year by taking on a more formal course. David Hensley, the head of the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center, will be creating a medical technology class that will bring together students from the colleges of business, law, engineering, and medicine. Mr. Hensley anticipates the participation of 16-20 medical students in this unique program. If you are interested in participating in the Iowa Medical Innovation Group, please email Tyler Rasmussen (tyler.rasmussen@gmail.com) or Thomas Waterbury (thomas.waterbury@uiowa.edu).
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ticket for PAULA, DUI, open container, possession of a controlled substance, public intox, etc? No thanks. But I digress.

It seems to me that some persons, hereafter referred to as the “Rats,” have set about to sow suspicion and mistrust among our happy community. Some malcontents, some zealous narcissists, have taken it upon themselves to make complaints to school authorities over social events. And this, my friends, is the type of thing that “really grinds my gears” to quote the eminent philosopher Peter Griffin.

Here we are at this excellent institution, surrounded by some of the brightest, most intelligent, young-ish people. This group is ecletic, and our passionately held views often contradict one another. Despite these differences, we strive to coexist, to cooperate. Our medical ambitions require us to keep our records clean from even the suggestion of unprofessional behavior. Knowing this, it is easy to see how we could find reasons to mistrust one another.

Yet against all odds, idealistic members of our student community step forward. They volunteer their time and energy to coordinate social activities for this dynamic group. And in a noble effort to avoid eliquisiation, these party planners try to ensure that EVERYONE gets an invite. They invite the quiet ones, the conservative ones, the ones with obnoxious voices, and the ones that smell like anatomy lab. EVERYONE. It is enough to warm the cockles of my tiny, cynical heart.

And then comes the fall. A school-wide message from Dr. Cooper. I share a quiet conversation with a disheartened student following his reprimand. My teeth grind and my fists clench. I am Jack’s seething rage. This group, this place, had given me such hope. Hope that we could be both passionate in our views AND accepting of the alternatives. Hope that there could be respect in the face of disagreement. And most of all, hope that we could come to one another with grievances, rather than involving authority.

So many questions remain unclear. Who are these people, these Rats? What was so offensive about an open-ended invitation to a party? Was it the mere presence of alcohol? Was it the location in a dimly lit and noisy bar? Why do Rats run straight to the authorities? Why not ignore the invitation? Why not accept his offer to not receive future invitations? Why not confront him? Why sneak quietly into the Dean’s office to make trouble? Why kick someone in the groin when they come to you with open arms?

Medical student professionalism is a big gray area in our little CCOM universe. No one can agree on how to judge student behavior once we’ve taken our short white coats off for the day. Who is to say I am unprofessional if I enjoy posting Facebook photographs of myself drinking Appleton’s in fishnets and leather chaps? I stand ready to defend my decisions to the Deans should they ever find fault with my personal choices. But I despise those Rats who would judge my actions yet be too cowardly to confront me directly.

Perhaps you think I’m overreacting? When this first happened to my buddy, I vented for a couple days and let it go. After all, what can we do? The Rats among us will observe and complain, and there is nothing to be done. Policy protects those who claim offense, and common sense be damned. So if ranting is all I can do, I might as well have an audience. Even now, I hide behind a thin veil of anonymity. This is my best attempt at speaking truth to power.

Classmates and colleagues, I believe we have Rats among us. Their power lies in policy and political correctness. Don’t let them win! Go out with your classmates. Blow off the accumulated stress of pharmacology exams and surgical clerkships. Because if professionalism exists, it is much more profoundly personal than we are lead to believe. And if you see Harb, tell him he rocks.

The Student Education Committee “e-published” their USMLE Step 1 information document and it is now the number one hit on the OSAC website! Other projects include working with students and administrators to make Clinical Beginnings Week activities more hands-on, and exploring the possibility of creating an “Intern Bootcamp” for M4s. Additionally, our Tech Committee is crafting Google Fusion Tables to enable students to search for Residency information and find UICCOM alumni contacts at different programs. They are also developing focus groups to strategize about optimal laptop usage for the new CCOM technology initiative for the incoming first-year class.

Those are the updates from UICCOM Student Government. If you have comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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