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Hello second years!

Congratulations! You are about to embark on an academic adventure, one that will end with you successfully completing the infamous USMLE Step 1. I know that you have already been talked to by faculty, and may have even begun some reviewing (or just worrying), but I wanted to take this opportunity to pass on some tips that I feel are very important in your preparation for the exam.

I found that when I tried to begin my boards preparation, I was overwhelmed. I knew that I needed to know "everything," but I didn't know how I should begin. Most of my questions were ones of *process*, instead of *content*. They were: "How should I study?" "How do I create a schedule?" "With whom should I study?" and "What materials should I use?"

You will be soliciting advice (or may receive some without asking) from your peers, the 3rd and 4th years, and sometimes faculty. It's important to remember that everyone studies differently, and that all advice is not perfect. However, I hope to share with you some overarching ideas that should help you through this exciting and overwhelming time.

1) Create your study schedule and decide on your materials now. Grab a monthly calendar or print one off of Microsoft Words Calendar Wizard (see attached). Using the general topics from the colored study guide, the USMLE website or the Kaplan table of contents from the home study program (essentially all the same), break down topics and make sure you touch on all of them before the last few days prior to your exam. You don't have to "boards study" every day during the rest of the semester, but you should schedule some weekly time. Then once you are done with finals, you should schedule full days of studying. Your daily schedule for full days should incorporate time each day for questions, lunch, working out, and mental breaks.

As far as which materials to use...there are a billion choices. I think EVERYONE should have a **First Aid for the USMLE Step 1**, and **Kaplan Q Bank on the computer**. I also personally recommend the Kaplan home study program because it consists of two large books with everything in them. However, if you already have started another collection of review books, that's great! Just make sure you have review book resources to cover each topic (not textbooks, review books). Even more importantly, decide what you are going to use, and buy it now. That way, you can start using them as you study for mechanisms, marking them up, and making friends with them.

2) **Incorporate group or pair learning into your studying.** You probably already know whether you are a solo studier or enjoy group learning. Regardless of your main preference, identify a person or a group of people whom you feel you could study with and somehow incorporate regular sessions with them. It may be once a week, for an hour each day, or all day every day. Group learning promotes accountability, allows for you to hash out concepts which may be difficult, and keeps you from isolating yourself for an entire month! You can use group or pair time to teach each other about a specific topic, do clinical vignettes, or even read aloud.

3) **Practice questions, practice questions, practice questions!!** This is where Kaplan Q Bank is invaluable. (Book questions are great to have too, especially if you want to do some portable studying.) After EVERY session of studying, you should do a few questions pertaining to the topic which you just reviewed. Also, after you answer each question, look to see if you were correct, and READ THE EXPLANATION. You should use Q bank to assess if timing will be an issue for you, and where you need to go back and review again. Remember that practice questions, when used correctly, are an awesome learning tool. Don't just use them to see what percentage you are getting right, use them to solidify and clarify knowledge. You really don't know what you've actually learned until you have to answer a question about it!

4) **Layer boards review into your studying for Mechanisms of Human Disease now.** I know you are currently studying new material in pathology, and you still have to face finals, but one of the best things you can do is to start bringing your boards books along to your regular studying and open them up to the topic. For instance, once you start Reproductive pathology, go back during that week to your wonderful boards books and review reproductive anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and pathology. Not only will it help you come June time, but you will do better in Mechanisms!

5) **Review, review, review!!** Lastly, it's important to remember that you should not simply look at Immunology once and ignore it until your test day. I found the best way to keep reviewing was to devote some Q Bank time each day to all of the topics that I had already covered. I recommend that during the last few days before your exam, you go through First Aid (now tattered and torn and well loved) one more time. It will help you with the highlights and buzzwords surrounding each topic.

I hope this has been helpful to you. Best of luck to you on the USMLE step 1 and in your future careers as physicians!

Sincerely,

Jessica Dingman, MSIV