



We can train them, but how can we retain them?

To the Editor: The Department of Surgery at the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine is proud of its 100% pass rate in the October 2008 Colleges of Medicine of South Africa examinations held in Durban. Most candidates attended the graduation and joined the 3 who passed in May as registered specialists in general surgery. This represents a stalwart effort on the part of the candidates and their tutors, the consultants in the department. Professor Robbs, in his retirement year, was justly proud of this achievement and honoured that our candidates asked him to robe them at the graduation ceremony.



Fig. 1. The graduating candidates.

Despite the quality and success of the trainees, only 3 of the 15 have been appointed as consultants in KwaZulu-Natal province, one has left for Witbank, and one is about to leave to take up an appointment in Johannesburg – this despite the fact that the departments of surgery in the province have the posts to employ the majority of them. Unfortunately, although a total of 9 posts are available and have been motivated to be financially unfrozen, no interviews have taken place. This inertia at the provincial administrative level to finance and advertise these posts exists despite a public statement to the contrary. The Medical School has also been ineffectual in influencing the provincial health authorities to fund over one-third of these posts which are on the 'joint medical establishment', i.e. joint university and provincial posts.

This impasse surely needs to be addressed so that interventions to institute meaningful dialogues between the province and the Medical School can occur.

If no urgent solution to this problem is found these individuals will leave, and at least 3 are actively pursuing an overseas option. Others will head for the already over-manned

private sector or to other provinces. Once they leave they are unlikely to return.

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The tokoloshe homunculus

To the Editor: The hippocampus is that part of the limbic system responsible for short-term and spatial memory. Increased activation of the hippocampus and related structures during seizures and REM sleep has been demonstrated in functional MRI (fMRI) studies. In fact, the hippocampus is particularly susceptible to electrical overstimulation and seizure sequelae. The dorsal extension of the hippocampus (the indusium griseum – also called the supracallosal gyrus) comprises two thin grey-matter strips that overlay the corpus callosum; it is a vestigial structure of unknown function in the postnatal brain.

A popular theory in neuroscience literature, proposed first by David Chamberlain¹ and later by Michael Persinger,² is that the indusium griseum plays a functional role in the developing fetus; it is viewed primarily as the embryonic equivalent of the adult hippocampus and secondarily as the sensory homunculus of the fetus. In the latter function, it has a somatotopic representation of the fetus equivalent to the adult postcentral gyrus representation of the adult form. This fact implies that stimulation of this vestigial structure could conceivably result in the visual or otherwise experience of the stored sensory homunculus of the fetus. The outcome would be visual hallucinations of a small humanoid with a large head, big eyes and a small body.

Various descriptions of visitations by tokoloshe-like small humanoids have been documented over the centuries; they are named differently by different cultures, e.g. cherubs, harpies, muses, incubi, succubi – and perhaps even Martians. Temporal lobe epileptics are known to have formed hallucinations that include a human form of varying sizes. It is likely that activation of the indusium griseum secondary to hippocampal stimulation, by moments of distress, dreaming or seizures, can result in a visual experience of small humanoid creatures of this type.

The tokoloshe (or tikoloshe or tikoloshi) in African mythology is a humanoid creature about 1 m tall, with a large head, big eyes and a slender torso. It is (allegedly) mostly nocturnal and friendly to children but can be harmful to adults if under the influence of evil witches. Raising one's bed by placing it on bricks (allegedly) offers some protection against