

# dear residents

All That We Do Not Know

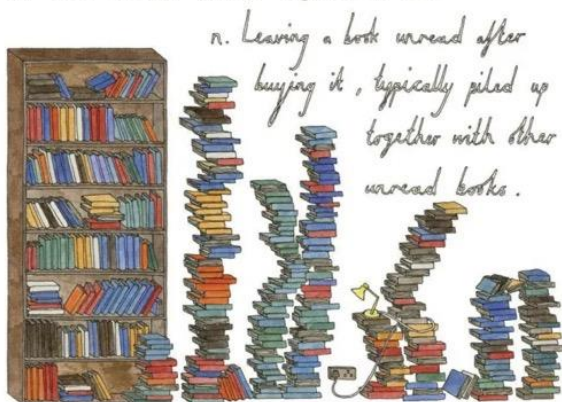
March 24, 2024

Dear Residents,

I recently enrolled in the ABIM longitudinal assessment pathway (LKA). It a relatively new option for maintenance of certification. I expect that all of you are aware that at the conclusion of residency training, you will take an initial certifying examination administered by the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) and for some of you, an examination in Neurology (ABPN), Psychiatry (ABPN), or Pediatrics (ABP). You will be issued a time-limited certificate (10 years for IM, Neurology and Psychiatry; 5 years for Pediatrics). In the recent past, the only option to main certification in Internal Medicine (and additionally Rheumatology for me) was to take a recertification examination every 10 years. I have done so three times and now that I am due to do so for the fourth time, I have a new option – answer 30 questions each quarter online and get instant feedback and explanations. The pass/fail decision follows after completing 600 questions over 5 years. Of my first 30 questions in Internal Medicine, as expected, I got a few wrong – this reminded me of what I do not know. There is new knowledge around us, new ways of solving the old problems, and new ways to make fewer errors.

At home, I am surrounded by stacks of unread books. I am a casualty of the New York Times Books Section. And I really enjoy visiting our local neighborhood independent bookstore (Interabang Books) and the enormous Half Price Books on Northwest Highway. Most of us have some unread books on our shelves. I have this menacing stack of recent purchases (and gifts) that I do plan to read at some point – they look at me like they know I am guilty. The Japanese have a term for this – *tsundoku* – which combines *tsunde-oku* (letting things pile up) and *dokusho* (reading books). Nassim Taleb in his book, *The Black Swan*, refers to such unread books as the *antilibrary*.

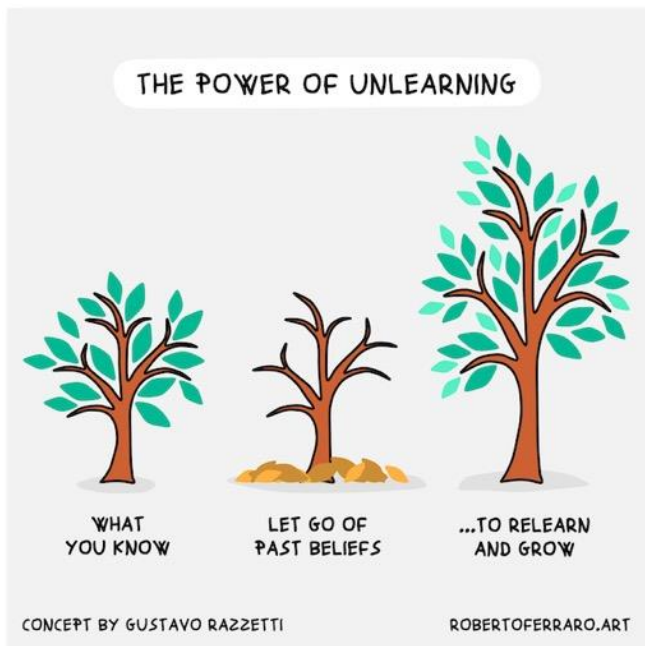
## TSUNDOKU



Source: <https://www.themarginalian.org/2015/03/24/umberto-eco-antilibrary/>

Both the concepts of *antilibrary* and *tsundoku* are grounded in the idea that when we are surrounded by knowledge, even unread knowledge (books), it serves as a reminder of what we don't know and are yet to learn. There are updated guidelines, new review articles, newly described disorders, and fresh clinical trials that we have yet to digest. It is clearly impossible to read and keep up with everything. But just knowing that it's there serves to keep us intellectually humble. These unread books of mine are a constant reminder of what I don't know. One should always fear the "know it all" person simply because that just isn't possible. We all get the illusion of confidence – [the Dunning Kruger effect](#) – a cognitive bias that leads us to inflate our self-assessment of knowledge.

At this point in your training – your knowledge is current, practical, and readily retrievable. You have less to unlearn and more to learn. For me, I must unlearn a lot to make room for new knowledge. I am stuck with old names for diseases, old drugs I memorized years ago, older ideas that are no longer tenable. Sometimes, I wish I was in your shoes again – effortlessly picking up new and current knowledge. For me, now it's an effort to do so, but ultimately very rewarding.



Source: <https://www.robtoferraro.net>

Best wishes for a week of new knowledge,

Dino Kazi