Maintaining Life Outside of Academics
Panel Discussion

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Objectives

The practice of emergency medicine is extremely stimulating and compelling. Academic emergency medicine can become all consuming if the physician allows it to be. Being a one dimensional clinician is not only unhealthy but may lead to career dissatisfaction and ultimately burn out.

This panel session will discuss the aspects of work life balance and how to preserve professional and personal fulfillment.

1) Depict how to balance the demands of job and family.

2) Describe the balance of activities outside of medicine such as how to find or maintain hobbies as well as remain in contact with close friends and family.

4) Define participant's priorities and professional goals and reconcile them to obtain balance.

5) Identify that obtaining work-life balance requires time management skills, prioritization, boundary setting, and proactive intervention to maintain balance.

Questions for the panel
1) How do you balance activities outside of medicine such as how to find or maintain hobbies as well as remain in contact with close friends and family?

2) How do you define and reconcile your priorities and professional goals in the past, present, and future (as your career and life progress/change)?

3) What are your time management skills?

4) How do you prioritize responsibilities at work, at home, and socially?
   4a) How do you set effective boundaries and what are those boundaries?
   4b) When is it okay to say no and how do you go about saying no?
   4c) What proactive interventions allow you to maintain your work-life balance?

5) What are some pitfalls to avoid?

1) How do you balance activities outside of medicine such as how to find or maintain hobbies as well as remain in contact with close friends and family?

- Allow your hobbies to be easily accessible
- Have hobbies and activities that you can easily include your family or close friends
- Make it a priority to set aside time for your friends and family to either call or spend time with them
- Contact friends and family during down time or quiet time
- Chose a mode of communication that works best for you and your family and friends (i.e. phone, E-mail, or traditional mail)
- Make sure that you schedule time with your family and friends (vacations, dates, school functions, children’s activities). It is important to make it a priority and if it is a big priority to you, then it should be scheduled
- When opportunities arise to spend time with your friends and family make sure to take advantage of them and not let them pass by

2) How do you define and reconcile your priorities and professional goals in the past, present, and future as your career and life progress/changes?

- We all go through different stages of development at home and at work
• Accept that there will be times of intense productivity and times of lesser productivity
• There is an ebb and flow to academic medicine and no one can go zero to ninety 24-7-365
• Understand the ebb and flow of academics and work with your time commitment to excel professionally as well as personally
• Remember to chose the right projects at the right time
• Consider that everybody has the same amount of time in the day
  o It is all about how you choose to spend that time
    ▪ In other words what are your priorities
• Be prepared for your priorities to change year to year or even month to month depending on the demands of your time may be whether they are personal or professional
  o Consider the following analogy we don’t drive our cars by putting them on cruise control, you adjust the speed based on what the terrain is or what the traffic is like on that road
• Consider making a list of your goals and priorities and then reviewing both for feasibility
  o Then show your list to your significant other, a close friend, or mentor and seek feed back regarding practicality
• Once you have made your list estimate the amount of time you think it will take you to achieve your goals and then triple that time to give yourself a true realistic estimate

3) What are your time management skills?

• Keep a to-do list
• Use spare minutes wisely
  o Answer e-mails between meetings
  o Use a portable hand held to answer E-mail
• Find the right time where you write best or perform academic responsibilities best and try to get those items done during those times
• Have a schedule that you are able to communicate to your significant other and co-workers if you have someone who can help you manage that, that is very helpful
• Block time for family and activities
• Become a task manager and chip away at projects
• Budget your time wisely
• Don’t worry about small stuff
• Be careful not be too rigid and stuck to a schedule
  o Remember it is okay to be flexible and it is important to take a break from you goals and pay attention to your priorities.
• Find the right time to do monotonous tasks such as E-mail
4) How do you prioritize your responsibilities at work, at home and socially?

- Remember it is a juggling act
  - There is always a ball in the air so be careful not to drop it.
- Choose tasks within your niche
- Your first priority is your personal life (i.e. the home front) and then work is a close second
  - Even if they name a building after you in 10 or 20 years from now no one will remember why or who you are. If do a great job at home that will be echoed through generations.

4a) How do you set effective boundaries and what are those boundaries?”

- Reserve one day a week consistently for family and put it on your schedule
- Consider your significant other’s and your family’s boundaries when you set your boundaries
  - We want our significant other to take us into account before they go on a business trip or do something else.

4b) When is it okay to say no and how do you go about it saying no?

- Say yes at first then as you develop a niche its okay to say no
  - At first you will have to say yes to find you niche and establish yourself
  - Be careful not to select a niche too early
  - Be open to new growth opportunities that come your way
- It’s okay to say no but that is only after you have established a pattern of saying yes and of productivity
- Once you have your niche then you can prioritize what you say yes or no to
- Also do not be afraid to say no and say no with a qualification
  - In other words, I’m way too busy right now but if this is still available in three months, please ask again
- Remember before saying yes
  - Speak to your significant other
  - Do not let a yes encroach on your highest priority item whether it is home, work, social life, faith, or whatever item is your highest priority

4c) What proactive interventions allow you to maintain your work-life balance?

- Create a structure to around your priorities to facilitate them
- Develop a master schedule with your clinical schedule, academic schedule, administrative schedule, and family events
The master home schedule allows you in a proactive sense to prevent conflict. In advance work out days off and time with family and friends.

- If you are romantically involved and wish to remain so, plan a date night regularly.
- Find a professional confidant who you discuss opportunities with before you agree to them.
- Do not have meaningful conversations, discussions, or decisions following night shifts – ever.

5) What are some pitfalls to avoid?

- Reality check, you have to realize that you can’t have everything
  - You can’t be a full professor in five years, a wonderful parent, and a wonderful significant other.
- Be aware of the “Cult of Personality”
  - The charismatic leader that has it all
  - You are not him or her and you have to find your own path
    - You really have to find your own way to do it and your own niche and you have to find your own way of balancing.
- Beware of title envy
  - If you want to be a program director, if you want to be a chair, you want to be a research director, you have to ask yourself why and does that fit within my goals. If it doesn’t fit and you can achieve your goals without it, then why do you need the extra responsibilities?
- Avoid taking on too little or too much responsibility
  - Your goal should be to have steady progress ahead and be consistent.
- Be careful not to worshiping false gods
  - In other words saying is more important than anything else and just losing sight of keeping the main thing, the main thing, is the key.
- Realize not everything in life can be planned so expect the unexpected.

For further information see:


