Juggling Career & Family While Avoiding Burnout: The Challenge of Oncology

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How Do You DO It All?

- Mom
- Wife
- Daughter
- Sister
- Pediatric Oncologist
- Fellowship Director
- Researcher
The Elusive Work-Life Balance

https://www.facs.org/education/division-of-education/publications/rise/articles/work-life
Stressors

• Lack of role model
  – Need for sponsors & mentors

• Role Strain
  – Managing & fulfilling competing & fluctuating roles
  • Professional vs Family Roles
You have only one life boys. So take it slow and don't burn out like Danny.
Burnout

• Demands exceeding resources
• Maslach’s 3 components
  1. Emotional Exhaustion
  2. Depersonalization
  3. Reduced Personal Accomplishment
• ↓ Motivation & Empathy → Suboptimal delivery of care
• With time: job dissatisfaction, guilt, lower self esteem, ↓ personal accomplishment

Fish JD, et al. PBC. 2018;65:e27244
Maslach’s Burnout Inventory

- Exhausted, tired & physically run down
- Annoyed or irritated towards coworkers
- Cynical & negative toward work
- A sense of being overwhelmed & lose temper
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Experience difficulty thinking logically & making decisions
- Feel unable to relax & concentrate (at home and/or work)
Prevalence of Burnout in Pediatric Oncology

- 38% reported high levels of burnout
- 72% at least moderate levels of burnout
- Individual factors:
  - Personality Traits (empathy)
  - Emotions (doubt, guilt, sense of responsibility)
  - Professional characteristics (high motivation)

Fish JD, et al. PBC. 2018;65:e27244
Burnout: Risk Factors?

- **Demographics**
  - Younger vs midcareer
  - Single
  - Female
  - Responsibility for dependents

- **Workplace**
  - Demanding workloads & hours
  - Challenging working conditions
    - Lack of management support & not feeling like part of a cohesive team
  - Lack of recognition & lack of role clarity
  - Electronic medical records
  - Managing patient suffering

Fish JD, et al. PBC. 2018;65:e27244
Distressing Pediatric Oncology Experiences

- Witnessing emotional distress or physical suffering
- Breaking bad news
- Managing wishes & demands of parents
- Inability to control symptoms or cure patients
- Death of a child patient

Fish JD, et al. PBC. 2018;65:e27244
Death in Pediatric Oncology

• Cancer = Strong & meaningful relationships
• Death in childhood contradicts order of nature.
• Childhood cancer is leading cause of non-accidental death
• Prolonged, complex grief reactions
  – Sense of responsibility & guilt
  – Unmet professional goals & expectation, helplessness
  – Dual process of grieving for BOTH patient & family

Fish JD, et al. PBC. 2018;65:e27244
Compassion Fatigue

• Emotional state with negative psychological & physical consequences
• Emanates from acute or prolonged caregiving of people stricken by intense trauma, suffering or misfortune
• Affects caregivers ability to provide services
  – Emotionally, socially, physically, spiritually & intellectually
  – Lack of energy, ↓ output, ↓ performance
  – Unresponsiveness, apathy, callousness
  – Appetite changes & sleep disturbances

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Dr. Naomi Rachel Remen
Explaining Work

• Daily experiences difficult for friends, family & public to relate to
• “My Mom is a pediatric hematologist-oncologist so she is always late.”
• “Mom, are you going to another funeral?”
3 Commitments

**Family**
- Spouse
- Children
- Siblings
- Extended

**Work**
- Patient Care
- Teaching
- Research
- Advocacy

**Self**
- Health
- Spirituality
- Interests/Hobbies
- Community
- Relaxation
- Reflection

Lucky Jain, MD, MBA
Emory University
True Grit & Resilience

Grit is passion and perseverance for very long term goals.
Grit is having stamina.
Grit is sticking with your future, day-in, day-out.
Not just for the week, not just for the month, but for years.
And working really hard to make that future a reality.
Grit is living life like it’s a marathon, not a sprint.

-Dr. Angela Lee Duckworth

Resilience is the ability to get back up when you have been knocked down.
It allows you to come back fighting stronger after a loss.
It is the optimism to continue even during tough times when everyone else gives up.

Personality Traits:
Self-directedness, cooperativeness, harm avoidance & persistence

www.alexishutson.com
“When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience.”

- Jaeda DeWalt
“Failure is an opportunity to grow”
GROWTH MINDSET

“I can learn to do anything I want”
“Challenges help me to grow”
“My effort and attitude determine my abilities”
“Feedback is constructive”
“I like to try new things”

“Failure is the limit of my abilities”
FIXED MINDSET

“I’m either good at it or I’m not”
“My abilities are unchanging”
“I don’t like to be challenged”
“My potential is predetermined”
“When I’m frustrated, I give up”
“Feedback and criticism are personal”
“I stick to what I know”

• **Minimize Scheduled Obligation**
  – Be present for yourself & your family

• **Schedule Free Time**
  – Find guilt-free time for yourself everyday
  • Exercise, hobby, baking
  – Mindful awareness
  – Improves energy level, self esteem & health
  – Better You = Better Mom & Better Doctor
Cultivate Self-Worth

• Perfection is the enemy of good
  – Avoid negative self-talk
• Allow yourself to get your needs met & look for good in yourself
• Acknowledge bad habits that hold you back
• Know that you are the one who is limiting your own self-worth!

Fitch, S. Remedy for Burnout. 2014.
• Choice is powerful
• What do you choose?
  – Happy, success, peace
  – To share talents & enthusiasm for life & career
  – the person you want to be!
Strategies

• Set priorities & goals
• Get rid of resentment
• Realign expectations with reality
  – May not fit social norms
  – Do not need to be perfect in every sphere
• Role cycling
• Hire help!

How To Develop Resilience

• Self-awareness
  – Aware of own expectations & behaviors

• Reflection
  – Good parts of day & learn from negative factors

• Control
  – Even if small parts (route to drive, lunch)

• 10-minute breather

• Connect with friends/family

Fitch, S. Remedy for Burnout. 2014.
Practice Gratitude

- Do not be picky: appreciate everything
- Find gratitude in your challenges
- Practice mindfulness
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Volunteer
- Express yourself
- Spend time with loved ones
- Improve your happiness in other areas of your life
My Children & My Patients: Who is Most Important?

Mother ↔ Empathy ↔ Doctor

Treasure each moment

Keep perspective
Gratitude wakes us up to the goodness and beauty in life.
But we have to choose it.

Tamara Levitt
Foster Support

Build layer of support around you
– At work & in community
– Support systems online

“Encourage, lift & strengthen one another. For the positive energy spread to one will be felt by us all. For we are connected, one and all” – Deborah Day
3 Questions to Ask About Your Job

1. Is it joyful?
2. Do I have the right skillset?
3. Does it matter? Is it meaningful?

– Lucky Jain, MD, MBA, Emory University
If we do not allow ourselves to experience joy and love, we will definitely miss out on filling our reservoir with what we need when .....hard things happen.”

-Dr. Brene Brown
Well-Being is not simply the absence of burnout – It is the presence of JOY!
THANK YOU!!!
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Anyone can slay a dragon, he told me, but try waking up every morning loving the world all over again.

That's what takes a real hero.

"Real Hero" © 2002, J.