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New Practitioners Network ***Work-Life Balance – Have You Mastered This Skill Yet?***

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You leave work at 6pm today even though you were scheduled to work until 5pm. You were busy with meetings, your floor was busy with critically ill patients, rounds went on for too long, and the student you were precepting needed help. It was too busy to take lunch so you grabbed a few cups of coffee and ate something quick – chips, cookies, or doughnuts brought in by a patient’s family. Since it is likely too late to make a home-cooked meal, you consider picking up fast food for dinner on your way home.

How many of you find yourself in this kind of lifestyle? Once in a while? Sometimes? Or perhaps more frequently?

At a very young age, I decided to become a pharmacist. I was always very passionate about this profession where I can help patients, work with providers, and create a difference in patients’ lives. Pharmacy seemed like a great profession, especially for women, because there is always an option to work more or less depending on life circumstances.

I have now been a pharmacist for seven years. I have a successful career at Memorial Medical Center in Springfield, Illinois, a great family life, and two wonderful five-year-old children. When you look at my life from an outside perspective, it looks complete and just perfect. However, one thing I still struggle with daily is managing balance between my work and personal life.

Work is very important for most of us. However, some of the tasks I do as a mom and wife are solely dependent upon me. How can you accomplish these tasks when you have late meetings, live continuing education dinner programs, and assignment deadlines all while needing to take the kids to swimming classes, gymnastics, Kumon or soccer practice? And when is there time to cook dinner? How does a person handle these things?

Expectations of clinical pharmacists have changed tremendously over the years. Clinical pharmacists have a crucial role in patients’ lives, arguably more than ever before. We have the responsibilities of patient care, preparing for presentations or meetings, mentoring students, and involvement in process improvement projects. Balancing all of these tasks can be particularly difficult for new parents, dual-career couples, or single parents.

Here are nine tips for balancing work and life that have helped me tremendously.

1. Separate work from home
 - Do not check your work e-mail from home. Once you leave work, focus on life outside of work.
2. Set realistic goals
 - Frustrations usually result from unrealistic goals or expectations. It is extremely important to set small achievable goals to create a sense of satisfaction.
3. Look after your health
 - What you do outside of work also has a great effect on your health. Maintaining your health will increase your productivity.
4. Take regular breaks
 - This helps us re-focus on our work and enhances safety for our patients.
5. Learn to say no
 - This is easier said than done. When your plate is full, it is very important to say no to more assignments to maintain the quality of your work.
6. Ask for help
 - Do not wait until you feel overwhelmed with responsibilities. Ask for help sooner than later.
7. Does it have to be perfect?
 - Most non-pharmacy related activities do not have to be perfect. Sometimes, the extra time spent on perfection might be better spent on other additional activities.
8. Be open to constructive criticism
 - It may be wise to talk to other seasoned pharmacists to see how they manage their lives. Remember to remain open to feedback.
9. Find a hobby and leave work at work!
 - Try to find free time to enjoy what you like or do activities that you could not otherwise do because of a lack of time.

Pharmacy careers generally last about 30 to 40 years. Realistically, you cannot achieve everything in one day or even one year. You may be very involved when you first graduate, but you may find yourself taking a step back after starting a family. You can always become more involved as your family circumstances change. Do the best that works for you based on your current life circumstances. I would encourage you to always remember to enjoy each phase of life.

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