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**Finding Flexibility on a Hard Road**

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The road to becoming a physician is hard—full of bumps, curves, sometimes detours, and potholes. It’s a long, demanding journey. The subjects are complex, the hours in the hospital and time spent studying are long, and caring for patients can often be as much a mental challenge as it is physical. There are days when the weight of responsibility feels overwhelming, and the mental burden can build so steadily that, at times, we feel ourselves about to crack under the pressure. Learning, growing, and evolving as a physician is undoubtedly taxing, yet the rewards are immense. However, as rewarding as this career can be, it is equally crucial to recognize when the burden becomes too much.

In these moments, finding a balance between the demands of medical school and all that is outside the hospital walls is essential. This balance helps ease the burden, replenish our emotional reserves, and ensure that we don’t lose sight of the reasons we entered medicine in the first place. Work-life integration, or creating a sustainable rhythm between work and personal life, is not just a strategy—it’s necessary to preserve our well-being and ensure we can continue giving our best to our patients and ourselves. To me, work-life integration involves creating a harmonious relationship between the demands of work and the needs of personal life and finding a flexible approach to blending both spheres in a way that works for the individual. For a medical student, this might mean finding time for family events, leisure activities, or self-care, even when studying and clinical rotations seem all-consuming. I believe the key is not to stress about finding the perfect symmetry but to create a fluid and sustainable rhythm that allows for both academic and personal fulfillment.

In medical school, where the pressure to excel is constant and clinical rotations require full immersion, achieving work-life integration is particularly challenging. As a woman, I also face the added layer of societal expectations and gender dynamics with family and friends that can influence my experience of balancing study, clinical work, and personal life. Women often bear more of the caregiving burden at home and face implicit bias in academic settings, which can make it harder to navigate the demands of both school and life outside of it. There is often a sense that there is never enough time to do it all: finish reading the required materials, care for patients, and attend to personal needs.

Despite these challenges, I have found several strategies to help me better integrate work and life. These strategies are not foolproof, but they have allowed me to carve out time for myself and my loved ones while remaining committed to my patients and career as best I can in this season of life. One of the most crucial aspects, and probably the one I am successful with half the time, is setting clear boundaries between studying, clinical responsibilities, and personal time. I try to set designated study hours and reserve specific times for relaxation or fun activities. Having boundaries helps me recharge and return to my work with a clearer mind, ultimately making me more effective as a student and future physician. Although my success rate with setting boundaries could improve, I lean on the opportunities for flexibility, particularly in how I manage my time during clinical rotations or study periods. I take advantage of time between OR and clinic cases, studying, or catching up on extracurricular to-dos so that my evenings at home can be spent relaxing or enjoying time with family. On weekends, I find time to study in shorter, more focused blocks rather than trying to push through long, unproductive hours which allows me to stay connected with family and friends through phone calls or weekend visits. Small adjustments like this enable me to balance my academic responsibilities and remain close to loved ones.

In addition, I prioritize self-care through my hobbies, such as sewing, embroidering, and other arts and crafts. These creative outlets provide me with a sense of personal fulfillment and relaxation that helps me manage the mental and emotional stresses of medical school. Whether stitching a delicate design or experimenting with a new craft project, these activities allow me to disconnect from the intensity of studying and patient care and focus on something that nurtures my creativity and sense of achievement. Engaging in these hobbies is not just an escape but an essential part of my self-care routine, helping me to recharge and bring my best self to my work and personal life.

Navigating work-life integration as a medical student can be challenging but is easier with a supportive network. I actively seek mentorship from senior medical students, residents, and attending physicians who have successfully balanced the demands of medical school with their personal lives. Hearing about their strategies and experiences provides me with valuable insights and encouragement. Mentorship offers guidance and the reassurance that it is possible to integrate both work and life successfully.

As I continue my medical education, I plan to further refine my approach to work-life integration, like sticking a little firmer with those boundaries. I also aspire to advocate for better work-life integration policies within medical education, particularly around the need for flexible hours, mental health support, and acknowledgment of personal responsibilities. Ultimately, I aim to avoid getting trapped on a long, bumpy road where my studies and clinical rotations become the walls that confine me. I want to remain passionate about medicine while enjoying a fulfilling personal life, full of meaningful relationships, creative hobbies, and time for relaxation. Through intentional strategies, flexibility, and fostering a supportive network, I believe work-life integration is possible and essential to maintaining both academic success and personal fulfillment throughout the journey in medicine.