 Linda Brodsky Memorial Journal

**The Methods of Molly Mehta, MD in Training…**

*Molly Mehta*

Work-life integration (WLI) is a phrase that evokes hope and challenge, especially as a woman navigating the complex world of medicine. For me, WLI is about finding harmony between my personal identity and professional aspirations, recognizing that they are not competing entities but intertwined aspects of a fulfilling life. It’s the ability to show up fully for my patients while also showing up for myself—as a daughter, a friend, and a human being with passions and dreams outside of the hospital walls. This concept has been my beacon as I juggle the rigors of medical school in Chicago, a city that mirrors my whirlwind of ambition and adventure.

Medicine is often likened to “drinking from a firehose,” and that analogy holds true not only for the sheer volume of information but also for the emotional and physical demands of the field. As a medical student, I’ve learned to tango with this relentless pace, much like Chicagoans embrace the city’s unpredictable weather. One week, I’m braving a polar vortex to make it to my anatomy practical; the next, I’m soaking in the sunshine during a freak heatwave while reviewing flashcards in Millennium Park. This dance of adaptation has taught me an invaluable lesson: WLI isn’t about achieving perfect balance but about finding flexibility and joy in the chaos.

The challenges to WLI as a woman physician are multifaceted. The ever-present societal expectation is to “do it all”—to excel at work, nurture relationships, and maintain a Pinterest-worthy personal life. Layered onto that is the systemic bias that still exists in medicine, where women often face inequities in pay, leadership opportunities, and recognition. These external pressures can make it easy to feel like a prisoner of one’s career, sacrificing personal happiness for professional success.

But the most insidious challenge to WLI is internal: the voice that whispers, “You’re not enough.” As someone who prides herself on being hyper-independent, I often feel the weight of proving my worth to myself and others. It’s a mindset that can lead to burnout if left unchecked, turning ambition into a double-edged sword.

To overcome these challenges, I’ve embraced strategies rooted in intentionality and self-compassion. First and foremost, I’ve learned to view self-care not as an indulgence but as a necessity. During my first year of medical school, I struggled to separate the stress of studying from the vibrant energy of Chicago. But over time, I realized that integrating moments of joy into my routine—whether it’s savoring a deep-dish pizza, exploring a new museum exhibit, or simply taking a walk along the lakefront—made me a better student and, ultimately, a better future physician. These moments are my “prescription” for resilience, an antidote to the grind of medical training.

I’ve also discovered the power of community. During particularly challenging rotations, I found solace in the camaraderie of my peers, including my friend Tala, who’s on a similar journey. We hold each other accountable, share resources, and remind one another to celebrate small victories. It’s a reminder that while hyper-independence has its merits, leaning on others doesn’t diminish strength—it amplifies it.

Another cornerstone of my WLI strategy is setting boundaries and managing expectations. This means saying “no” when necessary—to extracurricular commitments, to perfectionism, to the inner critic that insists I must have all the answers. It’s about prioritizing what truly matters, both in the moment and in the grander scheme of life. For instance, I’ve learned to approach my schedule like a puzzle, weaving in time for academic pursuits and personal passions. If I have an exam coming up, I’ll carve out focused study sessions but also reserve an evening to catch up with friends or visit a favorite café. This dynamic approach keeps me motivated and prevents burnout.

Looking ahead, I plan to build on these strategies as I transition from medical school to residency and, eventually, to a career as a physician. I aspire to advocate for systemic changes that promote WLI for all healthcare workers, such as more equitable parental leave policies, flexible scheduling, and mentorship programs that empower women to pursue leadership roles without sacrificing their personal lives. As women physicians, one of our most vital steps toward equitable pay is mastering the art of negotiation and advocating for transparency. This starts with knowing our worth—understanding market rates, collecting data, and confidently presenting our contributions. I aim to foster open discussions about salaries among peers and mentors to dismantle the stigma around money talk. Additionally, I plan to participate in leadership development programs and mentorship opportunities to build negotiation skills. Advocating for institutional policies that ensure pay equity is essential, but personal empowerment and collective action are the driving forces toward lasting change.

On a personal level, I plan to continue embracing adaptability, practicing gratitude, and seeking joy in the everyday, whether it’s through traveling, exploring new cuisines, or simply pausing to appreciate the view from my apartment window.

Dr. Brodsky’s vision resonates deeply with me because it underscores the importance of agency in shaping one’s career and life. For me, WLI isn’t about having it all—it’s about defining “it all” on my terms. It’s about cultivating a life where work and personal fulfillment coexist, where I can be both a dedicated physician and a whole person. It’s a journey that requires intentionality, creativity, and a willingness to adapt—qualities that, like any good Chicagoan, I’m proud to embody.