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**From Doubt to Determination: Women in Medicine in the Pursuit of Work-Life Integration**

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Women have always held historical roles, but in medicine, women physicians have influenced and profoundly shaped generations of clinicians and students. Several of my mentors overcame great challenges and adversity to become trailblazers in historically male-dominated specialties. They pursued training in non-traditional medical institutions to accomplish their dream of being a physician, but when they forged their way into US settings, they had to demonstrate themselves as competent and proficient, often enduring extra obstacles to stand out. Their resilience inspires me as I continue to fight the ongoing battle of accusations that are thrown at women who plan to have a career in medicine–if they want a career in medicine, that is all they can want. However, as a woman, I have remained firm on the ground that I can reach my

dream career without giving up the other parts of “womanhood” that many say cannot coexist.

During my time completing basic science training overseas, I was deeply driven by an unwavering commitment to excel and distinguish myself. My goals and passions to achieve excellence, strive for perfection, and push beyond the ordinary, fueled an intense dedication, often requiring me to work tirelessly, pushing myself to the limits day and night. While seeking to serve others and help make the path better for them (classmates, junior students, patients, and community members), I forgot to take care of myself. After all, the age-old myth is that physicians are invincible, we do not break. By the end of my second year, the pressure I put on myself landed me as a patient in the hospital. I had to quickly learn about work-life integration, as the stress took a toll and threatened to rob me of the one thing I had been sacrificing for, becoming a physician. This experience made me realize I was on the verge of becoming a "prisoner to my career pursuits," and I knew I had to pivot quickly and make drastic changes to avoid heading toward potential ruin.

Before deciding to go to medical school, I had years littered with hesitation, burdened by stories of women struggling to integrate the demanding roles of physician and mother. The fear of sacrificing family life for professional success, left me questioning whether this path was right for me. That hesitation and fear evaporated when I began nannying for an astonishing single mother who was also a devoted doctor. She managed her career and family life with grace, embodying the balance I aspired to achieve. Later, I met other inspiring women physicians who shattered my doubts—women who traveled the world with their families while excelling in their careers, earning reputations for their kindness and exceptional care. These role models proved that thriving in medicine while nurturing a fulfilling personal life is possible and gave me a glimpse of my future reality.

I’ve also witnessed women physicians struggling to achieve work-life integration. One woman was a professor whose brilliance and dedication to her craft were unparalleled, yet her steadfast commitment of perfection left little room for rest or personal fulfillment. The strain of her unrelenting schedule became evident—missed meetings, visible exhaustion, and a moment of public frustration that left those around her stunned. Her struggles were a sobering lesson for me. I realized that without boundaries, the very ambition that fuels success can lead to burnout, undermining the ability to care for both others and oneself. This experience deepened my dedication to fostering sustainable work-life integration, both for myself and as an example to inspire women in medicine to thrive.

How can we provide proper care and compassion for others when our cups are left unfilled day after day? Jana Kingsford, a woman who did not let anyone stop her from her big dreams and motherhood, once said, “Balance is not something you find, it is something you create.” Everyone has a different dream when it comes to work-life integration. Some want to do it all, while others decide to focus on a certain aspect they desire most. Life is limited, and not every day is guaranteed. Therefore, we as women desire the right to schedule our precious hours according to our own priorities. My dream work-life integration is equal time dedicated to my professional responsibilities and to being a loving parent while ensuring time for self-care. By allowing women to create this balance for themselves, we will allow them to live with greater fulfillment, authenticity, and purpose.

Although previous women physicians have created the framework for work-life integration, there is still work that remains to be done. I find it foundational that women serve as examples for each other by creating a culture of collaboration, by sharing strategies, advocating for each other, and normalizing discussions around work-life integration. A topic that has once been perceived as taboo needs to become a normal conversation around the dinner table and the work conference rooms. We, as women, have to normalize women ranking their own priorities over others' expectations of them, and it needs to begin now. As Michelle Obama, a pioneering woman, voiced, “There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish. But we must remember, as we climb the ladder, to lift others up behind us.” I am determined to be a platform for change, ensuring future generations of women realize this truth far sooner than I did without having to go through it themselves– that they can embrace their professional and personal dreams fully and confidently, knowing they are capable of achieving everything they aspire to.