



Having Perspective: Personal Health and Family Life

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We became better pediatricians when our daughters were born. Questions of “why would you come to the ER for something so non-life threatening?” or “why are adolescent medicine physicians replacing primary care physicians?” now made sense after our children were born. Although we learned about the science of medicine in medical school (Penn State College of Medicine for Jodi and Jefferson Medical College for Robert) and residency (DuPont Hospital for Children for both of us), being parents has given us an even greater appreciation for the art of medicine. Our goals of being the Division Chief of Pediatric Emergency Medicine or Professor of Pediatrics within the Division of Adolescent Medicine were tempered with the realization that our children would take up most of our time and effort. And we didn’t mind the “sacrifice” one bit.

Being the personal Uber for our children, devoting a significant portion of our salaries toward their education and futures, and spending time down at Walt Disney World (yes, we are a Disney Junkies family) suddenly replaced meetings at work, time spent obtaining grants, and traveling all over the country attending conferences and scientific assemblies. Our lives changed when we had our daughters, and we consciously decided to adjust with these changes.

Personal Health Is the Ultimate Form of Wellness

Your health is not just your past medical history, the medications you take, or your vital signs. Personal health is a conscious decision to choose wellness in every aspect of your life, not just your physical well-being, but also includes aspects of your emotional, spiritual, financial, social, and intellectual states. Achieving personal health is not just feeding your body but nourishing your mind and spirit. The importance of making time for self-care and personal health cannot be overemphasized. Factors associated with the prevention of burnout among pediatricians include focusing on personal health and having supportive physician colleagues, while factors associated with decreased overall

satisfaction include inadequate sleep and working greater than 50 hours per week [1].

Balance Is the Key to Personal Health and Family Life

The key to personal health and family life is balance. As physicians, we are pulled in many different directions: work, family, personal interests, and community responsibilities. While your professional career often takes a significant portion of your time and effort, unless you have balance in your life outside of medicine, you won't achieve happiness or success in those areas of your life. Being in balance is about aligning what we do with what we value. Finding balance is being ourselves in the truest sense. It is discovering your passions in life, and prioritizing these passions in the structure of your day, week, month, and year. It is setting goals, both long term and short term. And if you are married and/or have children, fitting family life into this balancing act can be challenging, but rewarding in the end.

How Do You Attain Balance in Your Lives?

There are three steps to successfully attaining balance in your life:

1. *Develop a reflective practice:* Set aside time to reflect on a regular basis ...each day, each week, or once a month. Select a routine that fits into your schedule, but make sure that this time of reflection is without distractions. Externalize these thoughts, either with paper and pen, laptop, or electronic device. Reinforce and extend your self-reflections with your significant other, your family, friends, and/or colleagues and mentors.
2. *Reflect on your life priorities:* As mentioned previously, the key to personal health is consciously choosing wellness, finding what your passions are, and balancing and prioritizing

these passions. Answering the following questions can help framework this reflection:

- What do you hold precious in your heart about your life?
 - In what moments do you feel alive and well?
 - What gives you satisfaction and fulfillment?
 - Are your energies devoted to what holds meaning and worth for you?
 - When you have lived your life and are reflecting back on it, how will you want it to look?
3. *Consider your life responsibilities:* Attaining personal health can't be that easy, can it? No matter what, there will always be obstacles to overcome on your road to personal health. Answering the following questions can help identify these obstacles:
- Is the time and effort you are currently investing in certain aspects of your life moving you toward goals that are important to you?
 - If your life is balanced more in favor of your professional career, is the work meaningful to you?
 - Are the financial securities and benefits allowing you to have meaning elsewhere in your life?
 - Are there other tangible and intangible rewards?
 - Are you sacrificing too much for future goals?
 - Where is the right place for you to set the line between work investment and personal life?

Let's Spin the Balance of Life Wheel

The Balance of Life Wheel Assessment is a tool often used for coaching and personal development. The tool consists of eight categories formed around a wheel that are potentially important for attaining personal health and finding balance. Determining your present level of satisfaction for each category and then connecting the dots for each category identifies areas around the

wheel that may create imbalance. These categories include the following:

– Career	– Leisure and recreation
– Family	– Money
– Friends	– Spirituality and personal growth
– Romance/significant other	– Fitness and health

Once you identify your current level of satisfaction (7 = completely satisfied to 1 = completely dissatisfied) for each category in the wheel, complete the following table:

Category	Current level of satisfaction (7–1)	Present time/energy (%)	Importance in your life (0–100%)	Future time/energy (%)	Anticipated obstacles
Career					
Family					
Friends					
Romance					
Leisure					
Money					
Spirituality					
Fitness/health					
Total		= 100%		= 100%	

Setting Goals

Once you have identified and prioritized aspects of your life based on your current state of personal health and where you want to be, taking in account anticipated obstacles, it's time to set goals. Utilizing the SMART mnemonic, these goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely [2]. Provide short-term and long-term visions. Write a personal statement. Publically announce your goals and ask for follow-up and reinforcement from family and friends.

Advice on Attaining Personal Health from Two Pediatric Parents

We don't claim to be the experts (our children slept in our bed many nights and both have technologic personal devices that they sometimes spend too much time on), but here are some suggestions based on 9 and 13 years of parental experience, and 20 years of married life:

Communication is key. Seems logical and so easy, but fitting in time during the day to listen and express can be difficult when there are so many distractions. But it is a must. Perceived support from those around you, particularly family members, has been negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and burnout, particularly among female physicians. This stresses the importance of devoting time to developing and maintaining social relationships [3]. One-on-one conversation, during a walk or after the children go to bed, is the key to finding balance in an unbalanced life. Sharing your goals and expectations, along with your frustrations and obstacles, with your significant other and/or children may lead to happiness and an "it's us against the world" approach to life.

Your family can't be happy unless you are happy. Taking time for yourself in a busy world to reflect, relax, and rewind, apart from the family, is so important. For both Jodi and I, it's often when we work out or go for a run. Being happy and satisfied with your professional life reflects on your personal life, and vice versa. Continue to evaluate and prioritize aspects of your life, investing time and effort toward aspects that make you happy and cause little stress. Don't sweat the small stuff. Find personal time and space by creating an environment that enhances your comfort, concentration, and efficiency, protecting this environment from intrusions and avoiding interruptions.

Find out the passions of each member of your family and share these together (even if they don't interest you one bit). Making sacrifices is part of being a family. Going to see Sesame Street Live or visiting the American Girl Store in NYC wasn't always on our bucket lists, but the smiles on our children's faces made these experiences priceless. At the end of your life, you won't remember your total lifetime gross salary, the number of publications you've presented, or how many patient lives you've saved or impacted ... we will remember those memories shared with family, friends, and our children.

Find a mentor. As important as it is to have a mentor in your professional career, it's equally important to have a role model to guide you in your personal life. A life coach, per se. Throughout our careers, we have encountered physicians who were not only successful in their professional lives but were amazing parents, community leaders, and friends. They were physicians that we strived to become and made the most impact in our lives.

Saying "no" is the hardest part. This is so important to maintaining personal health balance, but so difficult. We are wired to satisfy the needs of others, both professionally and personally. But as previously mentioned, our personal health is of utmost importance, and aligning our priorities and goals within the limited time structure of our lives should be maintained. While it is important to honor commitments and responsibilities at work, we also need to know when it is important to say "I'm sorry, but I can't make that meeting, my daughter has a basketball game." In the same way that we tell the parents of our patients that it is important to take time off from work to come to an important appointment, we need to follow that same advice in order to care for our own children.



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