

BALANCE

Renaissance School of Medicine MeSH Newsletter



Let's Reflect

Finding balance in medical school can be a challenge, but it is immensely important as well. Here are some prompts to reflect on as you begin or continue medical school:

1. What does work-life balance mean to you?
2. How do you switch off? Do you schedule a time to exercise or engage in a hobby that you enjoy?
3. How does an individual's 'mindset' affect how they perceive their work-life balance? For example, two people with the same work and life commitments may perceive this balance very differently because of individual factors. Why do you think this might be?
4. What is good about your current work-life balance?
5. What is bad about your current work-life balance?
6. Do you think there are any other factors related to work-life balance that might affect students?
7. Is there anything that currently helps you to achieve your work-life balance?
8. Is there anything that currently hinders you from achieving your work-life balance?
9. Do you feel that your work-life balance has changed as you have progressed through medical school?
10. Do you anticipate changes to your work-life balance in the future?
11. What differences do you think there are to a work-life balance in medicine, compared to other careers? Do you think this is related to the hours worked, the nature of the work, or both?

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1) Your past: Where did you grow up? What were you interested in growing up? What was your journey to medical school?

I grew up right here on Long Island! I'm so thankful that I am able to be close to family during this medical school journey and to be back close to home. When I was 12 years old, I got knee surgery, and younger me was so fascinated by the whole process. From that point on, becoming a doctor was on my mind and my goal. I studied Biological Sciences at Cornell University to work towards this goal. However, because I have no one in the medical field in my family, I wanted to take some time before entering medical school to explore all aspects of the healthcare space. During my two gap years, I worked as a market researcher/consultant for a life sciences boutique consulting company in Connecticut. Here, I worked with pharmaceutical and medical device clients on how to best tailor their products to physician and patient needs. I am really grateful I had the opportunity to understand better the business side of medicine (and to learn how to live on my own and take care of myself post college as well!)

2) Your present: How has your medical school journey been thus far? What are your hobbies? What activities do you do to help you relax and cope with the stress of medical school and life in general? How have they helped you deal with these stressors?

My medical school journey has been such a rewarding one. I feel so privileged to be here, especially more recently during my clinical rotations as I feel I have learned SO much. As time goes on, I find myself becoming more and more confident, thanks to the support of wonderful friends, family, and mentors. Outside of medical school, I love to sing and run. Especially when it isn't too hot outside, I love running outside to get fresh air and help reset my mind. However, while I recover from an injury, I recently joined the gym at LA Fitness. I also love to record singing covers, both solo and with friends here in medical school! Sometimes in the moment, I am hesitant to take time away from studying (something that a lot of medical students struggle with). However, every time I take this time to take care of myself, reenergize, and reset, I never regret it.

3) Your future: What are you looking forward to in the near-future? What specialty are you interested in pursuing?

In the near future as I am going through the second half of rotations, I am looking forward to seeing the different types of surgical procedures, as before medical school I was never in an operating room! I am currently on OBGYN, and it has been so fascinating to see gynecological surgeries. Currently, I am interested in pursuing Internal Medicine, so this may be the last time I see procedures like these (although time will tell!) Within Internal Medicine, I can see myself both pursuing the General Internal Medicine route or subspecializing at this point.

4) This time's theme is Balance, something every medical student and even physician strive to achieve. What are some ways that you find a balance in work-life during school? Any advice for our student body?

This is a lifelong learning process in terms of navigating work-life balance in medical school, and this is something I am still learning to navigate.. However, I would say - don't ever let medical school get in the way of your passions! Make time for those passions, even if it only once a week that you have time for it. I find balance through my hobbies currently and for making time to hang out with friends at medical school. I also think it is important to stay connected to your loved ones outside of medical school, either over the phone or in person, as those people can serve as a nice outlet outside of medical school.

5) General Words of Encouragement for entering MSIs?

Have fun, and focus on the process! Sometimes, I find myself worrying about making mistakes and wanting to know every single little detail. However, ultimately there is always so much to know, and medical school is really all about embracing the learning process and growing from it each and every day. This time in medical school really is a privilege. Work hard, but be gentle on yourself in the process!



Dafni Frohman M4

1) Your past: Where did you grow up? What were you interested in growing up? What was your journey to medical school?

I grew up right here, in Setauket! It's sometimes weird being right back at home for school, but mostly in a good way. If we're talking career as a kid kid, I swore I was going to be a zookeeper, but I'm not really sure where that came from. By middle school, the dream became an architect, but genuinely my artistic skills are not nearly good enough. I eventually landed on medicine around end of high school and have stuck with that since.

2) Your present: How has your medical school journey been thus far? What are your hobbies? What activities do you do to help you relax and cope with the stress of medical school and life in general? How have they helped you deal with these stressors?

My journey in medical school has been a whirlwind, just as I'm sure it has for most of my peers. Things are literally flying by at all moments, and you just have to choose a few to hold onto and concentrate on. It's exhilarating and mentally challenging, but also very exhausting. That means when I get out of the hospital walls, it's so important for me to take a breather and reduce the number of stimuli ping-ponging at all moments.

Hobbies-wise, I enjoy running, baking, and keeping up with friends and family through constant phone calls / voice messages. Running allows me to shut my mind off for a bit, which is huge for recovering from the day. Baking is a newer hobby that came about by so many of my classmates being amazing bakers, so it doubles as socializing (and communal feasts). Highlights on that front include croissants, rainbow cookies, and birthday cakes. Lastly, phone calls and voice messages with people outside the medical school community remind me of the non-healthcare world and bring so much refreshing perspective. I would say all of this helps me decompress from the day-to-day chaos.

3) Your future: What are you looking forward to in the near-future? What specialty are you interested in pursuing?

In the near future, I'm super excited about taking some time off to travel a bit and visit extended family. Fourth year is a mix of electives you want to get more understanding of and interviews / applications for residency. I'm excited to get insight into some new departments and to start to feel out different programs during interviews to see what feels like a good fit for me. Personally, I plan to pursue Neurology during residency (if you have questions about the field – totally shoot me an email!)



4) This time's theme is Balance, something every medical student and even physician strives to achieve. What are some ways that you find a balance in work life during school? Any advice for our student body?

I am definitely still working on my own balance but can speak to things that have worked for me so far. Here's a list:

Allocating time blocks that do not involve studying or work - This may mean doing a Zoom with a friend from college or a paint night with other classmates where we try not to talk about school

Prioritizing sleep in medical school is not conducive to cramming and all-nighters

Getting out of town when there's a long weekend – maybe go to the city, or visit a loved one who is close by

Journaling about your experiences – it's both cathartic and it's so helpful in reminding yourself how you felt about each department/topic

Being lazy – sometimes you'll need to just watch bad TV for hours (my frequent Sunday mornings)

But I think you'll also learn what helps to reduce your own stress and can adapt that to your liking. For me, reading up the night before on the patients I'll see in clinic helps ground because you never know how hectic that day will be.

5) General Words of Encouragement for entering MSIs?

Congrats on getting into medical school, we're all excited for you to join our family! It'll be a mess, but also such an exciting time of your life. Be kind to yourself and others as you begin, and truly reach out to faculty, friends, and family for whatever you may need. Your people are important in these next few years, so use them!

Where is RSOM?

Work-life balance generally follows two schools of thought, living to work or working to live. The former is more reminiscent of the demands of a medical career in which individuals are forced to dedicate precious time and energy outside of their on-call hours towards their profession. The pervasion of this 'selfless lifestyle' is predicated on the systematic selling of self-sacrificing behavior as being altruistic and the responsibility of anyone who takes up The Oath. Fledglings who lack this trait are often considered to be not as committed as their peers or unfit for the position of medical professional. Similarly, the latter school of thought is often also romanticized as a way of fulfilling one's financial needs to fuel one's 'real passions,' whether it's traveling, shopping, or otherwise. Once again, displaying such lifestyle choices as student-physicians can cause both patients and colleagues alike to regard the individuals as immoral or misguided. Developing a sense of balance that meets the expected image of a physician while nourishing one's individual needs is a skill that is often overlooked in early training for medical students.

In a small study, performed at the University of Birmingham in 2021, 42% of medical students expressed sufficient support from friends and family throughout their time at school, but also remarked on the lack of facilities or resources present at the University or Hospital level. (1) Notably, similar studies have not been performed here at the Renaissance School of Medicine nor are there robust programs consistently discussing mental health issues such as balance and burnout. NAMI has met approximately twice in the last year, Group, a weekly medical student-driven open discussion platform, is down to four regular members, and TimelyCare mental health resources are based out of Stony Brook proper and not necessarily tailored to the needs of budding medical professionals. Other resources such as Pod Meetings are set every few months which allow for discourse amongst new students and those who have more experience, ranging from a few years ahead to decades. However, this simply is not enough structured aid or attention to general wellness. While the individual experience and interactions with established professionals can change the way students rate their overall level of contentment, these avenues rely on medical students being proactive once they realize they need help.

Furthermore, there are marked differences between balancing the physical and mental rigors of the classroom with the need to make time for self-care versus balancing entering into the hospital workforce and knowing when to emotionally settle down for the day. A study by Rosenfield and Jones (2004) expresses the need for self-awareness of the difference in mental headspace as medical students progress through their careers. (2) First-year students, although naïve and unknowing, seem to truly understand their patient's reason for coming to the physician's office whereas a more hardened veteran may be chasing a disease process. There are various defense mechanisms that affect how students develop their reactions to the clinical process and these serve as ways that allow them to detach themselves from events that would otherwise erode their longevity in this field. Some may refer to this process as becoming jaded and too far removed from what called them into the profession in the first place. Ultimately, this too is a matter of balance. If there were a better way to manage clinical anxiety, replacing it with something more filling, perhaps green students would be more readily able to preserve the ardor that drove them to medicine.

Medical students, who are paying extraordinary amounts for their certifications and training, deserve to be taken care of with the same if not greater standards than that with which they treat other people. The very concept of work-life balance is often tied to a decision medical students make when entering into a specialty rather than at the very beginning of their career. (3) Physicians often advise their pupils to consider the lifestyle that a specialty offers as one of the main criteria for pursuing it rather than the breadth of information it encompasses. In an article by the AMA, the highest percentage of physicians that were burned out or depressed and were willing to ask for help ranked only at 45%. (4) How can anyone expect students to speak out about such issues if suffering in silence is the accepted culture associated with medical professionalism? Unlike their non-medical peers who are already out in the workforce, new disciples of medicine are under the impression that they deserve fewer amenities than those who are getting paid for their training. There is no negotiating how much information and the level of expertise needed to call oneself a doctor. However, surely, there are teachable, integrable ways to spark self-sustained change in the way medicine approaches coping, self-care, and balance.

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2 Rosenfield PJ, Jones L. Striking a balance: training medical students to provide empathetic care. *Medical Education*. 2004;38(9):927-933. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2004.01931.x>

3 Tolhurst HM, Stewart SM. Balancing work, family and other lifestyle aspects: a qualitative study of Australian medical students' attitudes. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 2004;181(7):361-364. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5694/j.1326-5377.2004.tb06326.x>

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