WELLNESS MILESTONES

No Perfect Balance

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“I don’t know how you do it.” This is a statement that I have heard 100 times, and I still do not have an answer for. I know that it is a compliment, and for a nanosecond, I feel like I’m accomplishing something extraordinary. Then reality kicks in, and I am reminded that I don’t do it all and there is in fact a lot that doesn’t get done.

Most people do not know how you do it, because they see you are strong and that you are doing it, and they do not think they would have to resilience to persevere. But the truth is, of course they would. The fact is, do I have a choice? I didn’t choose to have two children who were born with severe visual impairments. I would never choose for one of my kids to have autism, but things are the way they are because that was the plan for me. Fortunately, choices that I have made have helped me balance a career, a family, and a life.

The Importance of a Support System

There are some things that I want to make very clear. The reality is that I don’t do it all; what I do accomplish I don’t do alone; and many things simply do not get finished. However, choices that I have made have helped me balance a career, a family, and a life.

I am surrounded with a wonderful group of friends who have provided an indescribable amount of support and comfort. I have learned that if I need help with something, I can ask for it.

Don’t expect others to know that you are feeling overwhelmed. As anesthetists, we can be type-A personalities and want to do everything ourselves, but delegation will go a long way toward keeping our sanity. I have a husband who has made it possible for me to balance life and kids and work and still maintain some kind of normalcy. He changes diapers, and does the grocery shopping, and listens to me vent about something that might not have gone my way. He has been my pillar of strength through thick and thin.

I work at a place where my colleagues treat me like a part of their family and understand the value of that word. They call and check on my daughter when she has undergone another operation and ask how the science test went that our household has been dreading. We all try to work together so no one misses a soccer game or doctor’s appointment. They switch call with me so that I don’t have to find a babysitter to spend the night when my husband works a 24-hour shift. Recently, someone switched call so that I could make it to the pumpkin patch for a field trip. Of course it worked out that I was up all night at the hospital with laboring epidurals. By the time I ran out the door, I had 35 minutes to drive 42 miles. I called my husband, who was also going to the patch, and asked him to bring me some clothes to change into since I was going on about 28 hours in the ones I had on. I made it three miles away from the pumpkin patch when I got a call that they couldn’t hold the tractor up any longer and they were headed out. I instantly teared up because this was yet another event that I was missing in the life of one of my sons.

When I was pulling into the field to park, my phone rang again. It was my husband who said that they were stopping the wagon, and if I could run through the field I could make the ride. I looked up and about 100 yards ahead of me was a wagon full of preschoolers and parents all standing and waving. I took off running through the field of pumpkins, mums, and tractor ruts full of water. By the time I got to the tractor, I had tears streaming down my face, mud splattered all the way up to my neck, and I had lost everything that had been in my pocket. I scrambled into the wagon, and there was my husband’s bemused expression and my son’s grinning face.
For the next five minutes, I wheezed out answers to how my night had been while my son continued to grin up at me. This was when I noticed that the tractor had stopped; everyone was unloading; and the farmer was thanking everyone for going on the tractor ride. Everyone wished us well in picking out our pumpkin, which as it turned out, was in an orchestrated patch about eight feet from my car. It took me 20 minutes to retrieve ink pens, and markers, and everything else that had flown from my pocket during my Olympic sprint, but the smile on my son’s face made it all worth it. It took the contributions of my work family and husband to make that moment a memory I will cherish forever.

Realistic Expectations

I have chosen to set realistic expectations and try to live a healthier lifestyle. I do not run marathons and I do not always make the healthiest selection off the menu, but I do make a conscious effort to regulate my sweet tooth and keep my caffeine to a reasonable level. It is very important to set aside some time for yourself and for your family. I truly believe that it is quality, not quantity, when it comes time to making time for my friends and family. I have chosen to set realistic expectations. If you try to give 110 percent at home and at work, you will burn yourself out. Focus your greatest efforts on the important things. Set priorities, and allow yourself to do the best you can with the rest.

If you would come to my house, you would understand the “I don’t do it all” part. Some things do not get done. I have learned to not stress out about the four loads of laundry that are spilling over the baskets. My yard has weeds in it and the grout could use a scrubbing, but these are the things that can wait for another day. Make a list of what you want to get done every month. Every day, pick a couple things off of the list and do them. If you stay focused and set priorities, you will accomplish what is important without being unduly stressed.

When I started anesthesia school, I decided that if I was going to make that commitment and spend that amount of time away from my friends and family, I was going to make the time with them count. In the end, I strive to be the kind of person my children aspire to be when they grow up. I want them to respect me, and I want to be their biggest role model. I want them to have all the opportunities that I have had. Balancing children and work cannot be viewed as a series of obstacles, but as a series of motivators so that we never lose sight of our goals. It may seem like an unattainable dream to do well in one area of your life without sacrificing the other. Being a parent should never be the reason that you don’t follow your dreams. It should be the reason you do.

I believe I was picked for this life because someone knows better than I do what I can handle. I may not like it and might fight it at times, but at the end of the day it is the very thing that I would not change because it has made me the person that I am today. I will choose to forgive myself for what doesn’t get done. I will tell myself that life is a series of the results of my choices, and I will choose to enjoy this crazy journey we call life, family, and love.

Balance is a feeling that we all hope to achieve, but it is a feeling that always seems to escape us. At the end of the day you have to acknowledge all that you have done and all that you have accomplished. The fact that you willingly did it today and you will most likely do it tomorrow means that you have mastered it as well as anyone else.

So, How Do I Do It?

How do you do it? How do I do it? For myself, I do it with a lot of help and acceptance, and the knowledge that all children, our children, are special. Cherish and enjoy every second you have with them.