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**LIFE AFTER FELLOWSHIP:
BALANCING WORK AND HOME**

You've completed your training and now you want to achieve a better balance between your personal and professional worlds. But how? ATS members offer tips on how to integrate your career with other aspects of your life—such as family, friends, community involvement, hobbies and creative outlets.

Q. That balance is important seems like a no-brainer. What's all the fuss about?

A. With the looming workforce shortages in pulmonary, critical care and sleep, “we need to encourage a work-life balance to attract the next generation of clinicians and scientists into these fields,” said J. Randall Cutis, M.D., M.P.H., who has made it one of his goals as ATS president to develop the Society’s ability to support its members in doing this.

Dr. Curtis noted that the healthcare professions have not historically done a good job of teaching clinicians and researchers to maintain a work-life balance, which has led to increasing rates of “burnout.” Promoting this balance will not only facilitate job retention, but it will also help individuals to reach their full potential, personally and professionally—ultimately benefiting patients.

Q. What is it about pulmonary, critical care and sleep that makes finding a work-life balance difficult? Isn't it hard for most healthcare professionals?

A. Yes, but the fields of pulmonary, critical care and sleep can be particularly demanding, unpredictable and exhausting. Those who specialize in clinical work often care for the sickest patients—a round-the-clock job that is by nature 24-7, said Patricia Kritek, M.D., chair of the ATS Members In Transition and Training Committee and co-director of Harvard Medical School’s Training Program in Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine. Patient care is constantly needed, and the extra paperwork and administrative management required in today’s environment only add to the burden.

“Specialists in private practice have to be available at all hours, day or night, and reimbursement limits income with few procedures, so financial success largely depends on the volume of patients seen,” added former ATS president John E. Heffner, M.D., who serves as William Garnjobst Chair of Medical Education at Providence Portland Medical Center. “In academics, on the other hand, young investigators have limited funding, which means that they have extensive clinical responsibilities that tax their time.”

And those at the bench or doing clinical research face a similar predicament as the field of research becomes increasingly complex. Investigators must balance conducting research with other concerns—such as developing research ideas, writing grants, publishing papers and, in some instances, teaching and administrative work. “For sleep researchers, finding a balance can be particularly difficult when each experiment takes place at night and can last for more than 14 hours,” noted Mary J. Morrell, Ph.D., who serves as a reader in respiratory physiology at the National Heart and Lung Institute at Imperial College, in London.

Q. Won't focusing too much on “non-work” pursuits limit how quickly I climb the career ladder?

A. Not necessarily. Taking time away from work and pursuing non-work activities can actually help you to become more focused, efficient and productive, according to ATS members. “If I know I have to finish a manuscript by the end of the day and have plans with my family that evening, then the manuscript will be finished by 5 p.m.,” said Marc Moss, M.D., professor of medicine at the University of Colorado. “Adopting a focused approach doesn’t allow you the time to obsess—and doesn’t decrease the quality of the final product.”

Dr. Kritek agrees. “Always remember that non-work pursuits are what keep you sane and happy,” she said. “Having outlets outside of your hospital, practice or laboratory will help regenerate the energy you need to succeed at your clinical or scientific pursuits.”

Q. With so many responsibilities on my plate, is finding a “balance” realistic?

A. Yes, but you first must identify what is important to you at work and outside of work, and then only agree to things that fit into your priorities. “Accept that you can’t do it all, professionally or personally,” said Renee Stapleton, M.D., who serves as assistant professor of medicine at the University of Vermont. “Know your limits and learn how to kind-

ly say ‘no, thank you’ to things that won’t help you to achieve your pre-set goals.”

And don’t assume that there is a perfect balance or that you can or should equally divide the time you spend on different activities, advised Dr. Curtis, who is professor of medicine in the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care at the University of Washington and head of the Section of Pulmonary and Critical Care at Harborview Medical Center. “Some people don’t like the term ‘balance’ because for them it conjures up an image of a tightrope walker trying to keep either work or non-work from toppling them over,” he said. “Instead, see it as a way of prioritizing and integrating aspects of life other than work.”

Q. There are only so many hours in a day. How do I determine what my priorities should be?

A. First, understand that this is a personal decision and that no single approach works best for everyone. Some people find that making a list of overarching personal and professional objectives before prioritizing tasks and projects can help. “Think of broad goals that advance your own personhood, family, friends, patients and community,” advised Dr. Heffner. “Then organize them under headings like respect, excellence, stewardship, creativity and compassion. When you do this, you soon realize that the specific tasks you perform or projects you adopt are less important than how they move you along the road to accomplishing your goals.”

Once you define your “bigger picture,” setting day-to-day priorities is much easier. “Figure out what success looks like for you,” said Dr. Morrell. “Decide what you want to achieve and by what point you want to achieve it. Look around at who you have to support you. Only tackle projects that are consistent with your bigger picture and be sure to set realistic deadlines that you will be able to meet.”

But be careful of multi-tasking, which can make you less efficient and slow you down. “I try to focus 100 percent on whatever task I am performing,” added Angela Wang, M.D., staff physician at Scripps Clinic Medical Group, in La Jolla, California. “My family, patients and colleagues know that when I am with them, they have my full attention.” And always expect the unexpected, especially if you’re a parent. “Sometimes, your immediate priorities have to shift. I have had to cancel meetings because my children were sick and childcare was not available,” she continued. “Other times, I have had to stay late at work and miss dinner with my family or putting my children to bed because of patient care responsibilities. But maintaining a clear view of my overall priorities and goals helps me and my family to ride out the bumps.”

Q. Are there ways that I can be more efficient in my work time and thereby make more time for non-work activities?

A. Spend a good portion of your early career learning tools that enhance your efficiency. Learn to write well by taking courses and reading style manuals. Ask more experienced colleagues to critique your writing and advise you. Become familiar with software that stores and analyzes data and catalogues your references to allow for searches and bibliography building.

And don’t be afraid to ask for help and learn to delegate. “Look around you and determine what requires your personal attention and what does not,” continued Dr. Wang. “At work, technicians and postdocs can help with aspects of grant-writing and manuscript submissions. Secretaries and administrative assistants can help with drafting letters and memos. And at home, a housekeeper can free up valuable time that you can then spend on other more valued activities.”

Developing networks of colleagues with similar interests can also help when specific challenges slow you down. “Become active in your professional society and leverage the experience of more senior members in your efforts to grow professionally,” Dr. Heffner suggested.

(continued on page 11)



(continued from page 9)

Q. But when I am at work, I am constantly being interrupted by e-mail and department meetings. How can I minimize these distractions?

A. Look for ways to have uninterrupted time while you work. For Dr. Stapleton, this means working at home one day a week, where she can write, read and edit without distraction. “If you can’t work from home, try closing your office door for a few hours, and make it a policy that you dictate and do all of your patient charting alone and uninterrupted,” she said. “And while enjoyable and necessary for camaraderie at work, keep in mind that a lot of time can be lost socializing.”

Try to minimize the number of meetings you attend each week—or at least trying to cluster them so that you aren’t running from place to place and from activity to activity. “And remember that projects will take as much time as you have,” added Dr. Moss. “If a meeting is scheduled for four hours, the participants will usually find a way to fill the four hours. But the same productivity might be accomplished in a two-hour meeting—saving two hours for non-work activities.”

Likewise, only answering e-mail during a specific time of day will help you to create larger chunks of time to make real progress on activities that take greater concentration, like writing papers, chapters or grants.

Q. My superiors are constantly asking me to take on more responsibility. How do I know when to jump at the chance and when to say no?

A. Look at your list of goals and determine if what you are being asked will help you meet them. “If non-work activities are important—and they are—then put them on your schedule and do not compromise them away,” Dr. Moss advised. “Don’t agree to things at work that are not important to your job satisfaction or advancement.” And remember that the same rule applies to your personal life. ■