

Welcome to the MGH Dr. Moms Forum!

by Monique Tello, MD, Instructor in Medicine

Let's start with a quiz:

Which of the following scenarios is totally normal?

- A. You're at home with your kids, and on call. You get a page that you know will require time and attention. Even though it makes you cringe, you flip the TV to the show most likely to mesmerize your kids so you can answer the page in peace.
- B. You keep your medical journals in the bathroom because that's the only quiet private time you have the chance to read them (without falling asleep).
- C. You're checking your work email while breastfeeding your infant. Oops- now you need to wipe breast milk off your computer keyboard, and the only reasonable option within reach is a breast pad.
- D. You're in the midst of a busy clinical day, with a crammed schedule of complicated cases. You don't have time, but you call home, just to hear your kids' voices.
- E. All of the above.

And the answer is E, all of the above. And yes, I have been to these places, and more...

Welcome to the MGH Dr. Moms Forum, a series of articles about being a doctor and a mother, a mother and a doctor... It's not clear what comes first, in our overlapping realities. What I have learned is that I can't imagine not being either. Or both.

I'm a part-time general internist in a practice that primarily serves women. It's a great fit for me, personally and professionally, and that was almost completely by accident.

I came to this gem of a practice in a serpentine fashion, passing first through a Med/Peds residency at Yale with a goal of working in international health, then a fellowship and MPH at Johns Hopkins with a clinical and research focus on the care of women with HIV. This was a cozy immersion in the world of grants and papers and conferences, until....

At age... um, let's say closer to forty than thirty, I realized I wanted to have a family. Actually, the desire to create a family hit me like a case of idiopathic hives (which I have also had). It was impossible to ignore.

Right around then, I had the extreme fortune to meet my future husband (online dating: ask me about it!). I gathered my thoughts, readjusted my life goals, and we decided to move back to Boston, where my family is, to start a family. I came here to MGH, we got married, and today, I have two beautiful little kids: a 3 year old boy (who also happens to be autistic) and an 18 month old girl.

And so it is that I am a doctor, and a mother.

These separate callings can compete with each other... huge responsibilities regularly tug us in different directions, and our attention can be divided, in ways that push our limits to a point of desperation... or hilarity. Depends how you look at it.

It's very important to point out that these callings complement each other. So many of my patients also love a child: they are mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandmothers... Many comment on the photos of my kids above my desk, and always from a point of warmth. Sometimes a story is told, a moment of shared experience, that takes us out of the clinical realm for a minute, and helps create or sustain the bilateral empathy that is so essential to the art of medicine. I have patients who I have followed for four years now (my whole attending clinical career thus far), and who themselves have followed me through my wedding and two pregnancies.

Writing about this experience keeps me sane, and some folks find it helpful/ entertaining as well. I hope that you'll look forward to some of the topics that will be coming up in the near future, and that you'll contact us if you would like to contribute your own writing to this space.

Dr. Mom's Upcoming essay topics:

Sleep deprivation and Dr. Moms

Sleep training your child

Flexibility in the workplace: essential for Dr. Moms

How to take care of sick people when your child is sick

Suggestions for building your support network