

Balance & Juggle

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Every day, I try to bring life:
prescribe medications,
ensure precision of slice,
carefully suture fascia to skin,
pull of the umbilical cord,
wait for the wail and cry,
observe relief on mother's face,
coaxing of placenta out.

Every evening, I observe
my own body the way it shapes
and changes. Too many times
to count, I gather the folds of
my skin to pierce with hormones,
I know the name of all too well.
So ready I am for another
to call this body home.
To call myself mother.

Every morning, I wake before
dawn. Ready myself to see
and do, stark reminders that
I spend more time in the hospital
than anywhere else. When I hold
scalpel in hand, I am reminded
that I chose this life. Despite
caution of work's consumption.

Every month, I feel more of myself
slipping away. Some days,
I wonder if the choice I made
was the right one for me.
No longer do I know where
my choices begin and end.
Frozen in my choices but also
feeling burned out.

Every year, I am reminded
my biological clock is ticking.
Mourning my youth and my
miscarriages. Such things, I
hold tightly to myself or
those close to me. Even as
my patients unravel joys
and fears, my face unrevealing.

Every moment, I navigate boundaries
of personal and professional,
of patience and frustration
of life and death.
I have spent my entire life
balancing and juggling.

Author's Note: This poem is a work of fiction inspired by experiences, observations, and conversations I have had with female physicians, colleagues, and mentors. They shared their stories of balancing their personal and professional life as they navigated titles ranging from trainee to mother. This piece aims to shed light on recent research highlighting that female surgeons face higher rates of infertility and are more likely to miscarry during pregnancy than the overall US female population. This piece is a reminder to all that being a physician is a choice, but also a sacrifice.

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