



THE WORK- LIFE BALANCE UTOPIA

What is work-life balance?

A Google search for 'work-life balance in medicine' gave 6,940,000 results, so take your pick. The more relevant question is **what does work-life balance mean to you?** Here are a few people challenging the traditional views on a balanced life.

- Dan Thurmon, TEDx PSU: Live life "off-balance, on purpose. Being off- balance is our reality"[1]
- Andrew Davies, Mastering Intensive Care Podcasts. Listen to eminent intensivists discuss work life balance[2]
- Michelle Ryan, TEDx Exeter: Work life balance- it is about balancing identity[3]
- Vivian Giang: 9 Different Definitions on the Meaning of Work-Life Balance [4]

Can an ICU physician achieve this Utopia?

Yes. But first, let's take the pressure off!

Work life balance is not a target to achieve or another item on your to-do list. Nobody lives the 'perfectly balanced' life every single day and the magic formula is different for every person.

So make up your own formula.

Here are a few tips

- Come up with your own definition of a balanced life. What does it look like to you? Then build boundaries to help you achieve that life
- What spheres of life do YOU want balanced? Work, health, relationships, personal interests, spiritual
- But this does not mean all spheres are in balance every single day. The right balance differs every day!
- Manage technology. Unplug. Log off. Enjoy the moment
- 'Approach balance in a balanced way '. Take small steps to introduce balance in your life

From the horse's mouth

*Tips from real doctors on working towards a balanced life

"I find as long as I can (a) find meaning in what I do, (b) exercise and (c) go on the occasional date night with my partner, I can cope with the times my life feels particularly unbalanced!"

"Leading by example. Nothing gives junior doctors the freedom to say 'no' like a consultant who displays balance in their own lives"

"Enjoying and loving life beyond work. Including going to a Backstreet Boys concert and applying for Masterchef auditions!"

"I feel balanced if I bring a sense of purpose and meaning to things that I do"

"As the demands on you increase the more important it is to put yourself first. Do away with the

guilt and remember the aircraft oxygen mask theory. You are no use to anyone if you aren't well yourself (mentally, emotionally, physically). I am the worst at putting this into practice but the biggest step for me was being told by an outside person that taking time out for yourself is ok, and actually quite important."

"Gave up ICU training after being unwell for a few months and came to the conclusion that I'm happy being an ICU CMO. And that there are truly job opportunities for CMOs, clinical and non-clinical. The journey can be hard but worth it. And you don't have to fit your life to what's expected. There are seniors and juniors (in the field of medicine) that are open and willing to help, whether to talk with or simply networking. Identify what's important to you and your life and focus on that. You can do it!!"

"Work-Life balance isn't just a women's issue! If the partners can get some balance as well they can do more with kids and home, rather than the women always doing the "double shift" of working and running the household. I had cancer treatment 4 years ago and hubby found that even in a surgical lifestyle there is room to take a step back at work sometimes. He's never gone back full time since then! He's had a taste of coming to school concerts and swimming lessons, and has realized there is life outside the operating theatre! And that he could easily miss it by being at work all the time. This has been the key to my being able to work more; that he's home more and when he's home he's an engaged parent who cooks, does laundry, listens to reading, does homework projects, etc."

"if you can take a break from training and go travelling or work part time for a while. Gives time to regain some hobbies and enjoy non-work stuff but also gives you a new interest in work stuff when you come back"

"For me work life balance is feeling comfortable with saying I need time off or can't stay back/ do an extra shift "

"Recognizing what you need to stay healthy and balanced as an individual and incorporating that into your work planning. For me that means having a schedule that allows me to have days I will see my children reliably (anaesthetics so early starts & late finishes & oncall means this can't be everyday & ICU is similar), scheduling regular leave (1 week several times a year rather than stockpiling), getting regular exercise, meal planning so that we eat well and no alcohol on the day/night before a work day. These things have taken some trial & error to work out what I need. I talk to trainees about working out what they need & then how to incorporate these needs. Admittedly control is greater once training is finished"

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REFERENCES

1. Thurmon D. Off Balance - On Purpose (The Future of Engagement and Work Life Balance), 2016.
2. Davies A. Episode 4: Neil Orford - Seeking optimal communication, leadership and balance. Mastering Intensive Care, 2017.
3. Ryan M. Work-life balance: balancing time or balancing identity? TEDx Exeter, 2015.
4. Giang V. 9 Different Definitions on the Meaning of Work-Life Balance. 2014.
<https://www.fastcompany.com/3037096/9-different-definitions-on-the-meaning-of-work-life-balance>
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