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Balance or Burnout

Introduction:

One afternoon, Dr. Afshan Najafi found herself facing more than just a medical challenge. Her patient, Alex (name changed for privacy), came in with a very bad autoimmune disease. Dr. Najafi began to worry about how to best treat Alex and she realized that this was much more intricate than any other challenge she had faced before. She had to navigate complicated social dynamics and, in the process, find people who could give her advice or suggestions on how she could treat Alex. (Moyer) This shows the challenges that Najafi had to face beyond just treating patients. As a patient of Dr. Najafi, I have seen that she is caring and takes time to get to know me outside of being her patient.

A pediatric rheumatologist's job is to be able to take care of kids who have different autoimmune diseases that affect different parts of their bodies. “Autoimmune” means that your body's immune system is attacking its own healthy cells and tissue, affecting different parts of your body. Autoimmune diseases are particularly complicated to research and treat because most of the diseases don’t really have a cure and they are still trying to find out why the immune system is attacking itself. Taking care of all these kids can be stressful because of all the research they have to do on their diseases, all the paperwork they have to fill out, and ordering labs or

tests for their patients. This complex work takes up a lot of their energy, and they could end up burned out, making them not have the motivation to continue doing their job.

Working long hours is something that can contribute to burnout so to avoid it and the emotional toll of the job Dr. Najafi likes to make time to talk with a friend on the phone, meditate, journal, or even do things that interest her as well as help her relax a little outside of the clinic. These habits reflect the kind of physician she strives to be: a compassionate rheumatology doctor who loves helping children by asking questions and providing sensitive care. She is able to maintain balance in her life in order to avoid the burnout that so many rheumatologists suffer today.

Chapter 1: Becoming a Rhuematologist

Dr. Najafi's love for helping children started in Tehran, the capital of Iran where she was born. There, her mother, a child psychologist, inspired her to become a doctor and motivated her to volunteer in organizations that were supporting children being affected by child abuse and child labor. (Najafi)

Her early love for science led Dr. Najafi to enter medical school in Iran. What was challenging about going to high school in Iran and then going straight into medical school is that she would be under a lot of pressure to figure out what path she wanted to take for her future. To get into medical school Dr Najafi had to take entrance exams during her senior year.

"When you're a senior you need to take an entrance exam for schools. So when you're a science major the entrance exams that you take can open up doors for everything that is related to science. It could be basic science like biology and genetics and everything or it could be medical school, dental school or like pharmacology so all those things. So you compete with so many other people and you need to study hard in your senior year, which that's what I did. I got a

high mark on the entrance exam so I could enter the medical school. When you enter medical school, so you go straight from high school to med school and the medical school is a seven year program." (Najafi)

To get a high score on the exam she had to study really hard. Dr. Najafi's passion for science encouraged her to study hard to get a high mark on the entrance exams. She also had to compete with people that were interested in any kind of science major. After getting a high mark on the exams she went straight to medical school. The medical school that she went to was a seven year program and during the first three years of that program she learned about things like human anatomy and physiology. Then in the next two years she did clerkship, meaning that she went to the hospital to learn how to take a patient's history and how to do physical exams. In her last two and a half years she did a combination of research and taking on more responsibilities.

Soon after she graduated medical school she had to move to the US because of family reasons. Here in the US she wanted to become a pediatrician so she took three USMLEs in order to have her medical degree accepted. After having her degree accepted she applied for a three year pediatric residency. In this three year residency she was trying to keep her options open for any other things that interest her. Her residency comes after many years of pursuing her passion for science which she developed near the end of her senior year in highschool. The other significance is that she spent seven years at her medical school in Iran and three years in the US so that she can get her residency. She got more schooling but also had to do more work. This helped her become a more knowledgeable doctor.

Chapter 2: Facing Challenges

As a young doctor Najafi is someone who is willing to take on any challenge. Many of these common challenges involve making high stakes decisions in diagnoses and in treatment.

Being a professional includes direct patient care as well as basic and traditional research while the goal is to reduce suffering regardless of culture, religion, and social factors. Rheumatologists have to ask questions like if anyone in the patient's family is dealing with the same disease or has dealt with the same disease and how does the disease affect the patient with their relationships as well as daily activities. This is extra hard for rheumatologists because lots of the immune diseases are so hard to diagnose, and a misdiagnosis can lead to people living in pain. Even after diagnosis Dr. Najafi has to research the disorder so that she can find the best way to treat her patients. She also has to research different ways to treat a condition, the risks of the treatment.

A challenge that Dr. Najafi was faced at Stanford when she was taking care of a patient that was very sick. She had to decide what they were going to do to try and help them in a very short period of time. Najafi had to talk with lots of other teams and her co-fellows that were also involved in this situation. It was very stressful for her and she worried that there was a risk that giving her patient too much steroids could cause an infection but she also worried that if they didn't then her patient wouldn't be alive for much longer. This is a common challenge that rheumatologists face. Glucocorticoids are steroid hormones that are produced from the cortex of adrenal glands. Unlike the anabolic steroids that athletes use to build up their muscles glucocorticoids are catabolic steroids that cause peripheral muscle breakdown. In addition, "With so many documents emerging and so much data supporting reduced glucocorticoid doing across the board, it raises the question of why, and when, to even use the drugs." (Volansky).This highlights the constant need for research because the data keeps changing everyday.

Glucocorticoids and CAM are both treatments that can help your body manage the symptoms of your disease. The patient could think that glucocorticoid is harmful and that makes it a problem for Dr. Najafi because she would have to try and convince them that it's not using the research she did on it to help provide proof that it isn't harmful. "Disturbingly, we see too

many patients skeptical of science, declining disease-modifying anti-rheumatic or biologic therapy due to reservations about side effects and expressing a preference for nebulous so-called natural remedies or complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). How can any reasonable person in 2021 refuse a COVID-19 vaccine? Why is it that so many of our patients are still enamored of CAM? We perceive anti-science sentiment and the appeal of CAM as similar, and both as a challenge and an opportunity for rheumatologists." (Nathan, et al.).

Chapter 3: Finding Balance

Stressors that have challenged Dr. Najafi in work and outside of work have been when she used to try and do most of her notes at home but now she's trying to do all of her notes in the clinic. While facing these challenges Dr. Najafi is able to find ways that she can relax and maintain work-life balance.

On top of directly caring for patients Najafi has to do look into all of these things and this can lead to overwork because it takes up a lot of time outside of the clinic. The extra work that they do means that they take time away from family, hobbies, rest etc. which can have an effect on work-life balance. According to the National Library of Medicine, they work an average of 50 hours a week and they do an additional 15 hours of paperwork (Kuhlmann, et al.). These very long hours can make it hard for a doctor like Afshan Najafi because it can take away time with her family or other activities that she enjoys doing outside of the clinic.

Beyond clinical decisions and workflow, another challenge Dr. Najafi faces is emotional fatigue, the kind that builds over time in her tough position. Dr. Najafi likes to try and make some time for herself to talk with her friends on the phone, meditate, and journal because they help her relax. She said that having at least 10 to 15 minutes or more time to relax then that would help her a lot. Dr. Moyer is Dr. Najafi's co-fellow and she views her as a friend as well as a colleague. Inside the clinic they like to talk with each other about a complicated patient or they

just like getting a second opinion on something. They also like to get ideas from each other and bounce them back and forth. They make lectures and give lectures to groups so that other people can learn about topics like lupus or scleroderma. Outside of the clinic they both like to go out and visit a historic place, or go on a hike, or even just go out to eat together.

In Dr. Moyer's view she thinks that burnout is a major issue for them because lots of states have a very little amount of pediatric rheumatologists and if there was a rheumatologist that was the only one in that state then seeing all their patients in one day would be very tiring for them. Dr. Moyer thinks that burnout happens when we are feeling hopeless to try and fix certain things and that it's really hard for them to think of how they can change the system so that they can help more people.

Conclusion

Overall we should care about doctors maintaining work life balance because we want doctors that are able to take good care of themselves and their patients. If they aren't able to maintain work life balance then they won't be able to take care of themselves or their patients. It's also important that they maintain their work life balance because if all the rheumatology doctors are burned out then there would be no more of them to help take care of the patients. Being Dr. Najafi's patient, I have really appreciated everything that she has done for me from the day we first met 2 years ago up until now. Besides getting to know me for my disease inside the clinic she also likes to take her time to get to know me outside of the clinic like what are my hobbies, what sports do I play, am I going anywhere for spring break or winter break, what school do I go to and what grade am I in. It matters to me that Dr. Najafi learns more about me on a holistic level because she needs to know what type of activities I do that might be affected by my disease in some way.

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Dedication:

I dedicate this book to my rheumatology doctor and to all the other rheumatologists out there that are doing their best to help take care of their patients.

Acknowledgments:

I want to thank my English teacher Mr. Greco and my Design teacher Ms. P at Freestyle for giving me suggestions and comments to help me improve my book. I want to thank Ms. Emily for helping me with the revision part of my documentary paper. I also want to thank my rheumatology doctor for accepting to be the main subject of my documentary. Lastly, I want to thank my dad for helping me come up with the idea to do a documentary on my doctor because without him I wouldn't have found a topic that was interesting enough for me to want to do a documentary on.

Preface:

When this project was first announced to me I was already trying to think of what I wanted my documentary to be about. This was my first time doing a documentary and I've never interviewed someone before. I am also a very shy person and I don't talk a lot around other people so asking questions to someone that I don't really know well or to someone I do know can be a little challenging for me.

Another thing that was new to me was Adobe InDesign. This was my first time using Adobe InDesign and designing a book in Adobe InDesign. It was a little tough for me to learn how to

use all the tools in the beginning, but as I continued working on my book I slowly started to get used to the controls and how things work in InDesign.

Initially I was thinking about doing my topic on the Los Altos Arts nonprofit but I wasn't having a lot of luck pinning down a potential interviewee. So I moved on to my next idea which was the Mountain View Teen Center but it took a while for me to get an interviewee for that too. While I was waiting for a response from one of the potential interviewees I was talking with my dad about other topics I could do and he came up with the idea that I could document my Rheumatology doctor. When I talked about it with Mr. Greco helped me expand on the topic and do it about rheumatologists burning out.

Throughout this project I experienced a lot of difficulties, but in the end I was able to get through all of them and learn things from them that could help me with any projects like this in the future. Overall, This project has helped me grow as a person and as a student at Freestyle.

Author Bio:

Sophia Kwong is a Junior at Mountain View High School. She is studying Design at Freestyle Academy. She loves doing crafts and playing video games during her free time. Her favorite music genre to listen to is Pop and a little bit of K-pop.