

# Doctor mum

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It's Orientation

The advantage of not bringing medicine home with you is the ability to appreciate those two smiling adoring faces as you walk in the door. Being present for them never fails to remind you that the stress of today, the assignments, the signatures you have to get from your supervisor are all miniscule problems in the scheme of things. Being a mum means having the most precious gift of perspective.

Second year was a lot better. I felt like I was getting ahead on the academic side of things having taken the opportunity to spend time studying over the Christmas break. My daughter was sleeping through the night but tiredness never catches you when you're a mum in medicine. This year I learnt the **power of power naps and studying smart not hard.**

Lectures finish at five minutes before the hour and start at five minutes after the hour. That is ten minutes of shut eye between each lecture and up to a forty-minute nap by the end of the day. By fourth year I had mastered the skill of sleeping on the bus which was a great pick up at the end of a long clinical day. With efficient sleeping so too came the ability to do efficient study. Studying medicine means adjusting to studying and thinking in a different way. In first year my study routine was kids both in bed by eight and study until around one or two in morning. I very much doubt I was the only student who did their study late at night but most would not have to be up at six again for breakfast and breastfeeding. You bury a student in

by spending countless hours on your attachments you might be a better person the next day by spending little precious time with the kids means you also make the most of every minute, which means more memories, more outings and more fun. Suddenly it's all about the beach, park or bowling, rather than studying - yes please!

In fourth year I spent a lot more time on my attachments. The kids were easier at this point. School life was stale, they knew where mum went every day when I got home in the evening. I would be greeted with little running footsteps and I knocked on the door. Highlight of the day -

Which brings me to **Lesson Number Four - Never discount other people's struggles.** It is easy to say that your stress and anxiety is bigger than the stresses of someone else that

day on their problems. Comparing their problems to your own is not your ability to empathise. No one's stresses are less or more challenging than your own - they are simply their own. My students work through their degree and through on weekends. I am blessed that my spare time is filled with park trips and playing games.

And finally **Lesson Number Five - Every student with children is given a gift in a special way.** For my family we got very used to our routine (or lack of routine). The course

like stability and a while. But every family finds their own rhythm in the course, ways to feel connected to their kids, and people who they can depend on for support, whether it's partners, parents, grandparents or friends. Like a medical student is the support network around you that

Yes being a mum in medical school is hard. I accept that being a doctor a mum will be harder but I have met countless women doing the same thing and know my family and I will adjust as we always do. In my first year I went to decide where a lot of medical students spent

One of the questions from the audience was "what is the best time you have as a doctor? I cannot say what it is like to have a baby as an inpatient or resident but you answer to this

nothing could be harder it is probably one of the most flexible periods of your life. Usually, while work out no matter where you are in your training. Being guided by your personal choice will allow you to know when is the right time in your life

Writing at the end of our year studying medicine there are endless reasons to say why it was hard - the hours, the convulsions, the examinations, the failures, the placements, the holidays. But really at the end of our year, I have just moments for it to seem distant memory. A faded horizon that is slowly washing away for me, with a fuzzy nostalgia obscuring the skyline. No matter how many people say they spent the first six months of their medical degree expressing millon their lunch break but I can, and I think that is an achievement in itself. People always ask me how have I done this with two kids, and the answer will always be I would not have it any other way.

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## Postscript

I wrote this blog just before starting Internship, a little over a year ago, giving advice on being a mum in medical school. Not much has changed from being a working mum in medical school to one working as a junior doctor. One thing that's improved is not having to study at home or at night after a long day. Though I think this will be short lived with specialty training applications, exams and programs fast approaching.

More than ever I value quality rather than quantity of time with the kids. Partly because I now have even less time with them.

The starts now are earlier and finishes are later. And there's....night shift! Though for me, night shift has its advantages. I see the kids a lot during night shift weeks, essentially getting home for breakfast and school drop offs plus having a normal dinner time - the kids are asleep while I'm working so it seems like I'm home all the time, and then you get a few lovely days home to spend together.

The lesson of being present has been an important one. There have been countless days where I've been exhausted, haven't had time to eat, have been affected by patients or the workload. But coming home to my family helps me to relax, release and recharge for whatever the next day brings. Being home and being present at home goes a long way in reaching that ominous 'home life balance' junior doctors are always told about.

I do not think anything could prepare my family and myself for the challenges of juggling working as a doctor but we adjust and move forward and I know there are many more lessons to come!

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