

Residents' page

Jennifer Yau, MD

Welcome back to the Residents' Page! I hope the responsibilities of a new residency year are becoming a little more comfortable (as somehow it doesn't necessarily get "easier" or "more manageable").

This month, Dr Lana Lovo presents some practical and enjoyable advice on how to achieve that elusive "healthy and balanced lifestyle." Resident well-being is an issue of ongoing interest and concern for the Section of Residents and for provincial and national resident organizations. This topic has been addressed before in the Residents' Page¹; however, I believe we

can all use a reminder to take care of ourselves and want to hear a little voice giving us permission to do so!

Dr Yau is a second-year resident at the University of Saskatchewan and is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of Canadian Family Physician.

Reference

1. Cuddihy H. Residents' page. Can Fam Physician 1999;45:2707-8 (Eng), 2722-3 (Fr).

Doctor, heal thyself

Lana Lovo, MD

The terms "residency" and "balanced lifestyle" seem to be mutually exclusive. Sleep deprivation, stress, and anxiety are simply accepted as part of the process of becoming a practising physician.

But does it really have to be like this? We all know conditions in residency have improved over time. Our predecessors worked to improve our lives, establishing, among other things, our resident unions and contracts. We have the ability to continue making changes. Start with your own life, then share ideas with others.

Live your life now. Don't wish it away with "when this (rotation, year, residency) is done, then I will find the time." This is not simply a painful stage you must rush through; this is your life. Take an evening off. Enrol in a community college weekend course. Get a partner. Get married. Get out of a bad relationship. Join a hockey team. Take dancing lessons. Make love. And laugh often; it is, after all, the best medicine.

Take care of yourself. No one else will do it for you. How many times have you been on call and realized that you have had to pee for the last 3 hours? Who is going to say to you: "I have noticed that your bladder is really full. Go to the washroom." Take a moment for yourself. Go outside for a breath of fresh

air. Exercise. No, I'm serious: exercise. It increases your endurance, improves your mood, and makes you feel better about yourself.

Drink more water and less pop. Eat well. A skim milk latte is not a balanced meal despite its ratio of calcium to caffeine. Do not binge in the middle of the night. Just because you are up and running doesn't mean that your metabolism is. Your cortisol might be at its nadir; you might feel terrible and cold, but that doesn't justify two doughnuts.

Take care of your relationships. If you don't take the time now, you won't have to later. That person waiting for you at the end of the day deserves the same consideration you should be paying to yourself. You think you had a bad day? How about listening to his or hers? And when was the last time you called your friend whose residency is at the opposite end of Canada? Or in a different part of your city? Do your parents remember what your voice sounds like?

Get a family doctor. Go to your doctor. This helps ensure you receive appropriate, continuous care. It is unethical to get someone in your program to phone a prescription to a pharmacy, especially since he or she probably didn't examine you. You also develop empathy for your patients when you are sitting in a waiting room... waiting.

Resources ♦ Ressources

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Don't take it personally. The health care system is under financial and psychological strain. Everyone in the hospital is almost as tired and stressed out as you are. If someone bites your head off, it is a dysfunctional coping mechanism, not your problem.

Don't take abuse. Whether it is scut work being dumped on you or an attending physician humiliating you in front of a patient, it is unacceptable. When you allow abuse, it is expected that your peers will too. Is this the legacy you want to leave? Try to deal with problems rationally and in a nonconfrontational manner. If this fails, enlist your program director; she or he can be your best advocate and protector.

Get involved. Various resident and medical organizations and councils, of which we are members, are

working to make our lives better. The "Canadian Medical Association Policy on Physician Health and Well-Being"¹ is an important document outlining means to a better lifestyle for medical students, residents, and practising physicians. Read it, and then work to implement it. Ask for what you want and fight for what you need. Future residents will be as grateful for change as we are.

Dr Lovo is a second-year resident at the University of Calgary in Alberta.

Reference

1. CMA policy on physician health and well-being. *Can Med Assoc J* 1998; 158 (9):1991-5.