



Life Balance...in the "On-Call" World



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ABSTRACT: We talk about our professional lives and our personal lives as if they can be separated. The truth is you have one life to live. The balance between work and life is a reflection of the balance within you. Life/work balance is a barometer for well-being: personal, professional, family, and community well-being. We stress the relationship between mind, body, and spirit and how the 12 steps lead to the B in balance. As one who has reinvented me professionally throughout my career, I am aware of the challenges of life-work balance. Regardless of the association, clinical or academic situation in which I found myself, I knew that something was missing... and that something was often at the expense of family relationships. Balancing a career or business with your personal life can be challenging, but not impossible. This article addresses the role of the radiology nurse in a life that challenges balance and sets the theme for a course of actions to build the life and career you want, need, and deserve. What better time to start that journey than now? (*J Radiol Nurs* 2016;35:37-42.)

KEYWORDS: Balance; Lifestyle; Fatigue; Stress; On call; Radiology nursing.

You are only as good as you are balanced. If you do not take the time for yourself, you won't be the best you can be.

Long shifts, long days, long weeks, and the need to be *on-call*—multiple responsibilities pull you in multiple directions! There is so much to do and so little time!

Is all this a cliché or is it reality? In today's health care environment, it certainly seems that it is indeed our reality—a reality of the times in which we live and our expansive scope of practice, especially for the radiologic nursing professional.

Nursing, more than ever before, is a challenge. And, nowhere is this more obvious than in the way in which nurses care for themselves. Caring for caregivers is a common theme. How can nurses care for others when they have no time to care for themselves? How can nurses continue to be the best they can possibly be to family, patients, employers, and others pulling them

in multiple directions? How can they practice safely in the face of fatigue?

FATIGUE

Any approach to addressing workplace fatigue must include collaboration among management and staff. In the health care setting, an assessment of current staffing, scheduling, and acuity levels is needed to avoid unsafe circumstances. Self-scheduling is perceived as an advantage on the part of nurses; however, the nurse selecting 72 hr in a workweek is following the path to fatigue. Autonomy might win, but the human body fails. Recommendations for identifying and addressing fatigue-related risks include the following:

- Assess your fatigue-related risks—staffing, consecutive shifts, on-call hours
- Develop a plan to include education, strategies, and role modeling
- Invite staff input in designing work schedules
- Create and implement an alertness management plan
- Provide nonpunitive opportunities for staff to express concerns about fatigue
- Encourage teamwork to support staff that work long hours
- Develop an internal system to monitor and report fatigue levels

Promoting a positive, safe, work environment reduces the risk for job stress and the associated

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1546-0843/\$36.00

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.radnu.2015.11.002>

difficulties with not getting enough sleep. Safe levels of staffing are essential to providing a safer environment for all workers, especially those with responsibility for patient care.

As nurses, you are responsible for practicing healthy behaviors that reduce the risk for working while fatigued or sleepy, support arriving to work alert and well rested, and promote a safe commute to and from work. Fatigue countermeasures can be as simple as taking breaks. In patient care settings, per diem (where temporary shift workers are needed on short notice) or float pool nurses can work during meal periods. Creative scheduling and nontraditional hours are an option for those who prefer to work partial shifts, yet remain active. This says it all, "As a workaholic, I simply ignore the signs of fatigue. I just keep going while at work and then I nearly pass out when I get home. Life can be very stressful." **Box 1** shows 10 tips for ensuring organizational leadership and commitment to antifatigue measures.

Balancing work and personal life can be a challenging task in the current American cultural climate. This is especially true of the nurse who takes "call." Nurses work more hours, take more call-time, have less time for ourselves, and we face a sense of urgency on a daily basis.

Is your performance impaired because you are out of balance? (**Box 2**). Are you caught up in the balancing act, unable to do it all and care only for others without caring for yourself? You are only as good as you are balanced! If you do not take the time for yourself—yes, even with the array of responsibilities pressuring you now—you will not be the best that you can be. That personal best includes you as mom, wife, friend, partner, professional, educator, or community leader. That personal best is what will enable you to reach

new heights in your career, to achieve your goals, and to maintain your health (**Box 2**).

THE STRESS FACTOR

Nurses have multiple sources of stress. From an unrealistic workload because of inadequate staffing, excessive paperwork, and computer charting; fluctuating schedules associated with changing shifts and being on-call; mandatory overtime; floating without appropriate orientation; and moral and ethical dilemmas, nurses see and feel it all. Life and family circumstances are also stressors. Perhaps, you are a single mom, raising a young family, and/or caught in that sandwich generation with young kids at home and aging parents in need of support. Many professionals have sought flexible, virtual arrangements in pursuit of balanced personal lives. We all have personal and career goals. By visualizing those goals, we empower ourselves to achieve them. Taking small action steps toward our goals puts them within our reach.

KNOW WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND WHY

In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey showed that for many of us, the day is filled with tasks that attract our attention and seem urgent, but they may never need to be done (Covey, 2004). Weed those out and make time for the important tasks. The important duties that are also urgent require our immediate attention. Learn to prioritize. Know which of the things you must complete today, or this week, are most important and engage in systems that can help you to stick to your schedule.

KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS

Are you an assertive type who finds it easy to say "no"? Or, are you a selfless type who takes on more than you can possibly handle? Negotiate for workplace balance by knowing yourself and your limitations, and remember that "no" can be a complete sentence. This means that it is perfectly acceptable to say "no" without any further explanation. Nurses are notorious for putting the needs of others before their own.

Box 1 Antifatigue measures

Attach a sense of urgency	Partner with staff to ensure consistency of policy and procedures
Create a collaborative work environment	Educate and empower staff
Identify the areas and practices that may result in staff fatigue	Prioritize fatigue countermeasures and monitor effectiveness
Evaluate staffing and scheduling practices	Offer opportunity for feedback and ideas for improvement
Engage staff in recruitment and retention activities and promote innovative strategies	Follow the system

Box 2 Work-related and nonwork-related contributors to performance impairment

Work related	Nonwork related
Work schedule	Quantity of sleep
Actual hours worked, including overtime and additional shifts	Quality of sleep
Type of work involved	Absence or present of sleep disorders
Work environment	Existing health issues

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