



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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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

Box 3 Apps

App	Benefits	Access
Boxie	A filing system that works, thanks to bookmarks (shortcuts) to your most-used folders	https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/boxie-prettyfy-your-dropbox/id674521086?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D4
Evernote	Stores notes for articles and research materials, archived Web pages and pdf documents	https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/evernote/id281796108?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D4
30/30	Your official To Do list—but think of it as a Will Do list!	http://3030.binaryhammer.com/
Mailbox	Puts e-mail in its place to facilitate use and reminders	http://www.mailboxapp.com/
Bugs and Drugs	A free antimicrobial susceptibility reference that provides geolocated bacterial resistance data to support clinical decision-making at the point of care	https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/epocrates-bugs-+-drugs/id706464884?mt=8
Lippincott Nursing Advisor	Lippincott Nursing Advisor app gives you fast and easy access to answers from a mobile source you can trust, anytime, anywhere	https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lippincott-nursing-advisor/id684901040?mt=8
Smart Medical Reference	Laboratory values reference, drug guide, differential diagnosis, tests and procedures reference, medical calculators, PubMed, Spanish dictionary and medical terminology	https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smart-medical-reference-lab/id574279132?mt=8
Infuse	A medication infusion and bolus calculator with the tools you need to quickly calculate drug dosing whether by infusion or by bolus	http://appshopper.com/medical/infuse
Greatcall	Symptom checker, medical dictionary, prescriptions by phone, and 24/7 access to live, registered nurses or board-certified doctors	http://www.greatcall.com/medical-apps/urgentcare

Perhaps, part of the gratification nurses get from their job is being of service to others. To effectively care for others, you must center yourself. There are several centering techniques. Many involve being quiet and still with yourself—either sitting, walking, or absorbed in a hobby. You can find one that empowers you. Practice your technique even when you feel great. It will help prevent stress and burnout.

HOW TO SEEK HELP

Successful people are not afraid to ask for help. Everyone needs help from time to time, and reaching out is an admirable skill. Be acutely aware of the stressors in your schedule and in your life. Know thyself first! Manage yourself, and take advantage of counseling, coaches, professional peers, mentors, and more.

COMMUNICATING THE NEED

If there is a teenager in your house, you fully understand the concepts of perception and reception—it is like the game, “Whispering down the Lane.” What you said is not always what is heard. Maintain a positive attitude and be clear in your statement. Make a connection with our listener, whether your communication is verbal or written. Request feedback.

TRY SOMETHING NEW

You may know that what you are doing now is not working well. Perhaps, the balance between your work and personal life is off. Working harder at the same activities does not create balance. Consider changing your schedule or altering your routine to try to reset the balance. Exercise in the morning instead of after work. Find a combination that works best for you and that re-energizes your life. Be mindful of the need for empowerment... to allow yourself to do something new for you.

HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT SEATS ON THE BUS

Having a lot of help is not enough if it is not the right help for the right job. Make a concerted effort to surround yourself with good people, and give them the latitude they need to do a good job.

FINDING FOCUS

For 1 day, notice how often you are not focusing on the task at hand. For example, during a phone call, are you thinking of what you have to do after you are done with the call? Are you on a Webinar and reviewing your e-mail log? Are you straightening the clutter on your desk as you listen to a coworker? Before you make a call or keep an appointment, take a moment

beforehand to say to yourself, "I will give this my full attention." Then, do it.

TRACK YOUR TIME

Do you often find yourself at the end of the day wondering where the time went? Consider tracking how long it takes you to do routine tasks so that you can better plan your time.

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

Right now, make an appointment for lunch or another activity with a friend or relative you have been meaning to spend time with. Better yet, make an appointment with yourself for an hour at the gym, a long walk, or meditation.

As a young nurse, I, too, began my career with the option that would generate the highest salary, working nights, multiple shifts, and 7- to 10-day stretches at a time—for income, for excitement, and to fulfill my aspirations of what nursing was and could become. Each of us has felt the same way at one time or another... idealistic, eager to offer service to mankind, eager to reach personal and professional fulfillment.

Along the way, we may have lost sight of our original reasons for entering the chosen profession. Perhaps, staffing patterns affected us. Perhaps, patient safety issues became an overpowering concern. Perhaps, family life interfered with our ability to be all things to all people! Perhaps, it is time for resilience!

BECOMING RESILIENT

Although workplace stress cannot be eliminated, the negative stressors can be reduced when nurses make caring for themselves a priority. Self-care can be a barrier to stress-related illness and contribute to your overall well-being. To maintain the delicate balancing act required for self-care, you must control your actions and personal/professional life. You must be resilient. Resiliency—the ability to pick yourself up and keep going—helps us to maintain balance. But, resilience is even more than that. It is picking yourself up, and then *breaking through* the stressors to keep yourself whole.

How do you become resilient? Here are some tips:

- Create a personal environment that sustains you. Your personal environment either sustains and lifts you up or sets you up for certain failure. Your daily life unfolds in this space that you have created through actions, reactions or nonactions. Be cognizant of these critical elements: your thoughts, physical condition, self, spirit, relationships, and finances.
- Bounce back as needed. Do not let minor setbacks hold you back.

- Stay in the present and move forward.
- Know when to ask for help and where to get it.

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. To maintain that delicate life/work balance, try these suggestions:

- Simplify your life
- Eliminate stress
- Negotiate for workplace balance
- Know your purpose
- Stay focused
- Eat well
- Get sufficient sleep
- Stay hydrated
- Allow humor in the workplace
- Dream big dreams
- Change your "to-do" list into a "must-do" list

Identify those things that must be done and those that can wait. Identify the groups to which you must belong and those for which you must volunteer your time and efforts. Although there is so much to do and so little time, take time for yourself and make balance a part of your daily routine! You will thank yourself and those around you will thank you too. Use apps appropriately to simplify your life. Never underestimate the sentence, "There's an app for that." (Wired.com, 2010). Some of my favorites, many of which are specific to nurses, may be found in [Box 3](#).

Apps are a great idea, but you must also keep technology in its place, especially when you live a life "on-call." Technological interruptions on your off-time from work can really put a dent into your downtime. University of Toronto researchers studied the impact of technology interruptions on life ([Pew, 2012](#)). They found that women, more so than men, reported higher levels of psychological distress from work-related contact outside normal working hours. Apparently, women were more distressed because they would feel guilty about dealing with work issues at home. Technology has simplified and complicated our lives. From electronic records to text messaging, our lives have changed and can sometimes seem to be controlled by bits and bytes. In an instant, we can send an e-mail message telling everyone on the "To" list the exact same thing at the exact same time. (Do not we all know someone who hit "send" on a "reply all" e-mail message and instantly regretted it?) Before, it was one postal letter at a time or one phone call at a time. We took the time to proofread and double check our work or words. We can also instant message, text, Twitter, blog, write on our or someone else's Facebook wall, tag (their photos), and receive endless Rich Site Summary feeds. In sum, we have far more contact

with far more people and information on a daily basis than ever before in human history. This can create unnecessary stress in our lives when we try to keep up with everything. And, it is okay to *not* keep up with everything!

As radiology nurses, you are probably familiar with the controversy over overexposure to radiation from our personal devices. There are no safe levels of radiation. The mass rollout of Wi-Fi over the past decade has been phenomenal as to how integrated it has become in all facets of our society and our personal lives. Yet, few have asked the most important of all questions, "Is it Safe?" At what levels does ever increasing Wi-Fi become dangerous to human health? Can it, or, is it affecting our electronic bodies, our well-being, and our abilities to think? And, to what degree, if any, do invisible radiowave and microwave frequencies begin to affect our own DNA structures? Wi-Fi safety is an important component of workplace safety and potential nurse fatigue.

The most prominent changes due to Wi-Fi radiation though is with our children and teenagers because of their developing immune systems and thinner skeletal structures: as stated by University Researchers, Government Scientists, and International Scientific Advisors, "a minimum of 57.7% of schoolgirls exposed to low-level microwave radiation (Wi-Fi) are at risk of suffering still-birth, fetal abnormalities or genetically damaged children, when they give birth. Any genetic damage may pass to successive generations" (Trower, 2013).

Federal and global regulations only deal with thermal heat exposure caused by laptops and such. They completely ignore the real dangers of low frequency radiation. An example to compare the two is that you can microwave your food, yet the inside of the box stays cool because radiation only cooks the food at the cellular level as opposed to a regular oven that heats the whole box with conventional heating.

Just as electromagnetic interference from wireless technologies interferes with an airplane's or a hospital's equipment—so it is too with our inner processes. We are electrochemical/electromagnetic creatures, as can be experienced when hooked up to an electroencephalogram (a test that measures and records the electrical activity of the brain) or an electrocardiogram (a test that checks for problems with the electrical activity of the heart). Because Wi-Fi is everywhere and everyone has sold out to its use, it is difficult to mitigate the effects. Be aware, and be safe. A good source of information is www.ihfglobal.com.

Know What Is Important and Why

Remember Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, in which the author 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.

CONCLUSION

Long shifts, long days, long weeks, and the need to be *on-call*—multiple responsibilities do pull you in multiple directions! We now know that there truly is too much to do and too little time! This is indeed our reality, and there are steps that we can take to generate balance. So, let us recap:

- No one knows you better than you; work that to your advantage
- Become a master of efficiency and draw boundaries
- Identify those areas of life most important for your well-being
- Know your limits and empower yourself to balance by slowing down, stepping back, and switching off as needed

We are not alone, and there are multiples resources available to us. These include:

- National Sleep Foundation Patient Education Portal www.sleepfoundation.org
- Nurse Fatigue—American Nurses Association <http://www.nursingworld.org/Environmental-Health>
- American Nurses Association Shift Work Sleep Disorder Kit available at <http://www.americanursetoday.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ant-5-SHIFTWORK-423.pdf>
- Sleep and Sleep Disorders www.cdc.gov/sleep
- Wisconsin Hospital Association Inc. Fatigue and Hours of Work Toolkit www.wha.org/fatigue.aspx

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