**Parenting and Training**

I am currently an orthopaedic spine fellow and I had my daughter in my ST3 year. Balancing training and being a parent have not been easy but I do think that it has made me a better person, doctor and mum.

My ultimate ideal at work would be that gender is felt to be irrelevant, that having both female and male surgeons was so normal that it was not even commented upon. The old stereotype of a male surgeon with a wife at home looking after the house and children is outdated, and I think that both genders now feel the weight of trying to balance parental and work responsibilities, and sometimes this creates a distance between the current generation of training surgeons with those that have gone before.

During my training I have sometimes felt less of a surgeon because I am also a mum, however in the school playground I have also sometimes felt less of a mum because I am a surgeon. I think the biggest breakthrough for me was accepting that I am in no way perfect and I am unable to completely change my personality just to fit in.  But being a surgeon and a mum is important to me, and ultimately being a good role model for my daughter is also important as it shows her that she can work towards any career she chooses. Once I understood this, I think it was easier for me to stop feeling guilty and focus on working out strategies which allowed me to find a work / family balance.

So now to some practical advice: good childcare and organisation is key to training.

Childcare

Most rotations will require you to move hospitals during your training, alter start and finish times, and on-call duties will often vary so good childcare is essential. I did not have family close enough to assist with childcare, so I have explored nurseries, childminders, live out nannies, live in nannies and au pairs. I ultimately chose nannies (live out and live in), nurseries and au pairs and managed to sacrifice in other areas to make this possible. There is no right, or wrong answer and each option has is own benefits and limitations, but without robust childcare focusing on training is impossible.

Consider LTFT (less than full time) training if your work/ life balance is not right for you. Do not consider becoming a LTFT trainee a failure in any way. It will allow you to tailor your time at work so that your training time is optimised and you are able to primarily focus on training opportunities over less useful activity. At the same time you will have more time at home to focus on family. It may not be the right option for you but if you chose this option, contact the LTFT representatives in the deanery who knows about this as hospitals often do not understand the rota rules or how to work out your salary.

Organisation

I am not superwoman and have no intention to try to be, so for me this means planning and using my time as efficiently as possible.

* Online calendars which can be shared with other people as necessary are essential
* Find out your rota as far in advance as possible (as this may affect where you live)
* Find out your work patterns / on call rotas and look for timetable clashes (bank holidays can be tricky if you are oncall)
* Book leave to cover half terms and holidays as far in advance as possible. Whilst a minimum of 6 weeks is often required to book leave, most leave is booked on a first come first serve basis.
* Supermarket shopping: I don’t have time, so I shop online. That way I can sort the weeks shopping when I have a “break” at work.
* Housework: I use a routine of little and often, or if you can afford it get a cleaner. I buy things that don’t need ironing, or wear scrubs whenever possible.