



Reflections

Journey of a Woman in Medicine

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After years of writing prescriptions and medical articles, today I'm writing something entirely different—this is the story of a woman's journey in medicine.

On her first day of school when she met her teacher, it left a lasting impact on her. From that day, she developed a love for teaching. She began dreaming of becoming a teacher herself. She enjoyed explaining things to her classmates, and in helping others to learn. Her parents chose the best school in town, run by nuns, despite its long distance from home, because education was paramount for them. She learned a deep respect for teachers from her school.

She was especially good at math and physics, traits she inherited from her father, and her dream was to become a math teacher. She would often teach her friends, feeling immense satisfaction when they understood a concept. Writing also came naturally to her due to the literary background of her maternal side of the family. But as she focused more on her studies to maintain her position as a top student, she had to let go of some of her hobbies like writing. Looking back, she regrets giving them up, realizing that being well-rounded is more valuable than being at the top of the class.

Her passion of becoming a math teacher was strong, possibly passed down through her family, where there were many exceptional educators. However, life took a different turn. Her father wanted her to become a doctor, something she hadn't considered until he explained that doctors also teach and mentor junior doctors and medical students. With that in mind, she shifted her dream to becoming a "teacher-doctor."

When she graduated from medical school as the third best graduate of her class winning gold and silver medals in basic sciences, she found herself in a difficult position. She wanted to specialize in basic sciences, but the opportunities of post-graduation in basic sciences in her city were limited. She initially considered histopathology, a laboratory-based field with less patient interaction, which appealed to her introverted nature. However, she eventually chose internal medicine. Diagnosing diseases and understanding treatments deeply fascinated her, and over time, she found her passion in the field. Despite her initial shyness and hesitation, she discovered that you can grow to love a job even if it wasn't your



first choice. One lesson she always held close was a saying by Hazrat Ali (R.A): "I recognized Allah through the revoking of determinations and breaking of intentions." This quote reminded her that no matter how carefully she planned, Allah's plan was greater. She came to believe that what Allah chooses for you is always the best, and this belief gave her strength through life's challenges. In a predominantly male dominated field, she stood out as one of the few female doctors in medical wards.

Throughout her life, she had always followed her father's guidance, seeking his counsel at every important step. However, the one time she couldn't follow his advice was when he suggested that she complete a six-month house job in gynaecology. From the very beginning, she felt that both gynaecology and surgery were not suited to her temperament. It was a difficult decision to go against her father's wishes, but deep down, she knew she had to stay true to her calling in medicine. This was the only moment in her life where she chose her own path over his advice, trusting her instincts

about the career that would truly fulfil her.

When she started her postgraduate studies, many discouraged her, claiming there was no future for women in medicine and urging her to pursue gynaecology instead. But she was determined to follow her passion, choosing a path she truly enjoyed, as making money was never her driving force. At the time there were very few female physicians in her town, and she faced numerous challenges in proving that women could succeed equally alongside men in the field. Some suggested paediatrics as an option, but her compassionate nature made it too painful for her to treat sick children, especially while leaving her own two-month-old daughter at home during her training.

Some recommended that she choose dermatology, but during her rotations, she found that it lacked the depth and challenge she sought. The idea of diagnosing a condition by merely observing a lesion and prescribing treatment felt too simplistic to her. By then, she was deeply immersed in complexities of internal medicine, particularly the art of history-taking and clinical examination, and she couldn't envision leaving that behind.

Her professors quickly recognized her passion and talent for teaching. Even during her house job, she was asked to teach clinical methods to students, and as a postgraduate resident, she regularly conducted ward classes. Later, as a senior registrar, she was entrusted with teaching fourth-year, and eventually, final-year lectures. Though initially tense at the thought of facing a full classroom, once she began lecturing, it felt as if she had plunged into a sea of joy, completely immersed in the pleasure of teaching.

For 25 years, she worked in a medical unit attached to a gastroenterology unit, where she had the privilege of being mentored by the town's most renowned gastroenterologists. Out of many, she was chosen for endoscopy training—a rare opportunity in an era when fibre-optic endoscopes were in use. At that time, only the person performing the procedure could see the lesions, so it didn't seem particularly exciting to the assisting doctors. But when the offer came her way, she believed that one should never turn down the chance to learn a new skill, so she accepted. She mastered both upper and lower GI endoscopies on the fibre-optic scopes initially, but soon videoscopes were introduced, and it was as if she had emerged from a tunnel into a whole new world. With the ability for everyone to see the procedure in real-time, the experience became far more engaging. She truly began to enjoy the skill and eventually led the unit for a year and a half until independent gastroenterology units were established.

She didn't begin private practice until five years after completing her post-graduation, which surprised many.

However, her priority was serving her alma mater. She only started private practice once both of her children were school-aged.

Early in her career, while still an assistant professor, she was entrusted with heading a medical unit—a role that presented a significant challenge. Administration was not her natural strength, as her heart was more inclined toward teaching and patient care. However, with dedication and hard work, she once again rose to the challenge and succeeded in a role that pushed her beyond her comfort zone. She believed in role modelling as a way to develop leadership qualities.

She was fortunate to have her husband's unwavering support throughout her journey. Like her father, her husband taught her to always prioritize patient care and never to compromise on it. From both of them, she learned the importance of dedication, especially in her profession. She often shared this wisdom with her junior female doctors, urging them never to say no to their seniors, no matter how tough a task seemed. "No task is too difficult once it is done," she would say. She consistently delivered to the satisfaction of her superiors. She also acknowledges the invaluable guidance of exceptional seniors and mentors who contributed to her success. And after years of tireless service, ultimately she assumed department's top role.

She encouraged young doctors, particularly women, to make people around them see that they are not ordinary women—they are doctors. "When you sacrifice your home and family for work, it's for a noble cause," she told them. "Make sure every moment away from your family is spent learning or caring for your patients."

Interestingly her children also inherited her love for maths but by divine providence or sheer coincidence also chose to pursue careers in medicine.

As she advanced in her career, she took on roles as both a doctor and a teacher, fulfilling her dream of being a "teacher-doctor." However, something weighed on her heart. She noticed that the standards of teaching were declining, and students no longer seemed motivated or eager to learn. This saddened her deeply, as she had always cherished the passion for learning that once drove her. Still, she remained optimistic and committed to motivate her students.

After nearly three decades in medical profession, she had learned valuable lessons that she wanted to pass on to the next generation. The first was simple: "Be truthful always. The truth will shield you, no matter the circumstances." She had witnessed that dishonesty destroys and integrity protects and prospers. Her second piece of advice was equally important: "Never seek revenge. If someone treats you unfairly, leave it to Allah. He will bring justice and bless you in ways beyond your

imagination."

In a profession that required both knowledge and empathy, these lessons had guided her well. She had built her life on honesty, hard work, and faith. Though she didn't become the math teacher or a histopathologist she once dreamed of being, she had found something even more fulfilling—teaching future doctors while caring for her patients.

Looking back on her journey, she saw how unexpected changes and challenges had shaped her. Every setback had brought her closer to where she was meant to be. She didn't have any regrets about the path her life had taken. Although she often heard that simple and straightforward people face a bleak future.

Now, as she reflects on her life, she hopes to inspire others, especially the young female doctors who often struggle with balancing professional goals and personal responsibilities. "Being both a woman and a doctor is a privilege," she tells them. "The sacrifices you make are worth it. Trust that Allah's plan for you is always better than your own, and everything will eventually fall into place."

The story is a testament to the power of hard work and commitment and that passion is not solely born from intention, but can be cultivated through perseverance and dedication, transforming even the most unexpected paths into remarkable journeys.