

Reflections

The Two Callings: My Journey as a Physician and Mother**Dr. Aisha Aziz****Beginnings: A Young Doctor in Karachi**

My name is Dr. Aisha Aziz, and I currently serve as an Associate Professor of Medicine at Rashid Latif Medical College, Lahore. My journey in medicine began at DOW Medical College in Karachi, fueled by a deep curiosity about the human body and a calling to help those in need.

After completing my MBBS, I began my house job at Civil Hospital Karachi — a place alive with urgency, where the smell of antiseptic mingled with the buzz of human voices, and where decisions had to be made in minutes, sometimes seconds. It was here I truly grasped the responsibility and privilege of caring for the sick. These formative months tested my stamina and sharpened my instincts.

Drawn to the intellectual challenge of internal medicine, I sat for the entry exam for residency and passed. I imagined my career unfolding in a predictable, linear fashion — long hours, steady learning, a gradual climb up the professional ladder. But life, as I would learn, rarely follows such neat trajectories.

Residency and Motherhood: A Double Marathon

Residency in internal medicine is already a crucible — long shifts that bleed into each other, ward rounds at dawn, and case discussions that stretch your mental limits. Into this, I introduced two seismic personal milestones: marriage and, soon after, pregnancy.

I had not planned to navigate pregnancy during residency, but I embraced it wholeheartedly. Yet the challenges were staggering. I remember doing ward rounds with swollen ankles after nights of little rest, and delivering case presentations while silently counting my baby's kicks. The fear of falling behind my peers was constant.

When my first child was still an infant, I discovered I was pregnant again. Suddenly, my life was a relentless rotation between night shifts and cramming for exams while rocking a baby to sleep. Sleep became an exotic luxury, personal time a distant memory. There were moments — many of them — when I considered walking away from medicine entirely.

**The Power of Support**

I made it through that grueling phase thanks to three anchors: the mercy of Allah, the steadfast support of my family, and the understanding of my supervisor. My family stepped in for childcare whenever they could. My supervisor did not see my motherhood as a liability, but as a fact of my life, offering me patience and flexibility where possible.

Just when I thought I had overcome the toughest hurdles, life presented me with another test. Three days before my final postgraduate exam — the culmination of years of hard work — my second child was diagnosed with nephrotic syndrome.

I was devastated. My mind kept slipping away from my textbooks to his swelling, his lab results, and his future. Sitting the exam felt like climbing a mountain in the middle of a storm. Somehow, I passed. But the real emotional high point of that period came later.

The Trophy That Meant as Much as a Degree

Months after earning my postgraduate degree, I stood in the schoolyard watching my four-year-old son

participate in his first race. His face was bright with determination, his small legs pumping furiously. He crossed the finish line first and received a shiny trophy.

As I clapped and cheered, I felt a swell of pride that rivalled — perhaps even surpassed — the joy I had felt on passing my exam. That moment taught me something profound: my professional and personal victories could not be weighed against each other. They were equally precious, equally hard-won.

Pressing Pause

The race and the realization it brought changed me. I knew then that my professional path would always be intertwined with my family's needs. I made the deliberate decision to pause my career to help my son recover and settle into school.

It was not an easy choice. I watched colleagues advance while I remained on the sidelines, and there were moments of doubt about whether I was letting go of my ambitions. But I also knew I was making an investment — not in my CV, but in my child's future and in my own peace of mind.

A New Chapter in Saudi Arabia

Life took a new turn when we moved to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I joined as a specialist, stepping into a system that was well-resourced, highly structured, and professionally rewarding. My clinical skills deepened, and for the first time in years, I could work without the constant pressure of exams.

On a personal level, the pace allowed me to be more present with my children. We built memories during those three years that I still cherish. But for family reasons, we eventually decided to return to Pakistan.

Starting Over — Again

Returning to Pakistan felt, in many ways, like stepping back to the starting line. The medical field had moved forward in my absence. Technology had advanced, academic expectations had grown, and I had to rebuild my network from scratch.

By then, my family had expanded. My older children were entering adolescence, a stage that brought its own emotional and academic demands, while my younger ones still needed close, hands-on care. The “two-job” reality — consultant and mother — became more complex than ever.

The Daily Dance

Some days, the balance feels perfect. A patient improves, a lecture inspires students, and I'm home in time to help with homework. Other days, the steps are chaotic — a child's school crisis coinciding with a medical emergency, or exhaustion clouding my teaching.

Over time, I've learned that balance isn't a static achievement. It's a constant process of adjusting priorities in real time. There is no magic formula, no fixed ratio between work and family. There is only the commitment to give each what it needs most in the moment.

Lessons Learned

Looking back, my path has been shaped by more than clinical skill or academic achievement.

- **Pregnancy during residency** taught me endurance.
- **My child's illness** taught me empathy.
- **Working abroad** taught me adaptability.
- **Returning home** taught me resilience.

I have come to see success as something broader than promotions or publications. It includes the quiet triumphs — being present at a school race, helping a child through illness, or mentoring a trainee in a way that makes them feel supported.

The Two Callings, One Life

I now wear my dual identity — physician and mother — with pride. These roles are not in competition; they are complementary. Both require discipline, empathy, and resilience. Both keep me grounded in what truly matters.

My life is still a dance — sometimes elegant, sometimes clumsy — between clinic and classroom, between playground and patient bedside. But I have learned to find joy in the rhythm, even when the steps are unpredictable.

For me, being both a doctor and a mother is not about achieving perfect balance. It is about embracing the complexity, adapting to the shifts, and understanding that the truest measure of a meaningful life is not how well we keep the two separate, but how beautifully we allow them to coexist.