



Dr. Mom

By Bridget Findlay, M.D.

Dr. Mom

The conversations started early, even before medical school. As an undergraduate, a mentor suggested I find an “easier” career to pursue – one that was less demanding with a shorter training timeline. She didn’t need to explicitly state her intent; the bias was clear. A career in medicine and having a family were mutually exclusive, at least in her eyes.

Despite those sentiments, I had my heart set on medical school. I not only joined the largest class in my school’s history, but also one with the greatest female representation at nearly 50%. Although we were a group of strong, independent women, we could not help but hear the echoing of gender stereotypes and their influence on future career choices. We were told to do what we love but be wary of fields with challenging “lifestyles.” When I decided to pursue a surgical specialty, the unsolicited advice/comments poured in.

“You can’t have it all – a family, successful career, hobbies, etc.”

“What does your husband think? Is he going to be the one to stay home to raise the kids?”

“By the time you’re done with training, it may be too late or risky to have kids.”

Apparently, being a surgeon and a mom were also considered to be mutually exclusive. While the culture in medicine has changed dramatically with the rise in female representation, the topics of family and fertility remain taboo, especially in surgical specialties. There is an underlying fear of judgement or being treated differently than our male colleagues. We suppress our own desires as to not burden others. If we don’t start speaking more openly about these topics, the negative culture will continue to be perpetuated.

It is hard to be what you cannot see. As more women enter surgical specialties, we will continue to re-write the narrative. Fortunately, I am surrounded by incredible surgeons and moms who blazed the trail for me and inspired me to follow my dreams both personally and professionally. In November 2021, I joined the ranks of Dr. Mom and faced new challenges that came with being a parent and surgical resident. Despite these challenges, I am proud to have the honor of carrying both titles. In the words of Dr. Jamie J. Coleman, “I am a better surgeon because I am a wife and a mother. And I am a better wife and mother because I am a surgeon.”

Although we are the products of those who came before us, there is so much more we can do to make the experience of those who follow in our footsteps even better than our own. As I

continue to climb the ladder of academic medicine, I will remember to look back and raise up those students and trainees following along behind; to inspire them to believe that they, too, can have it *all*.

Dr. Findlay is a third year urology resident at the Mayo Clinic. She is passionate about promoting women pursuing surgical specialties and research regarding gender parity in surgical training. She earned her undergraduate degree in Biochemistry from the University of Rochester and medical degree from Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.