

dear residents

156 weeks

October 23, 2022

Dear Residents,

I've been reading an interesting book about time management which is in many ways an anti-time management book because it makes the point that we will never accomplish all that we want to do. The title of the book is [4000 weeks](#) which is approximately the average current human lifespan. By this calculation, I have about 1000 weeks of time left in my life. I've been a program director for about 523 weeks. You will have utilized 156 weeks for residency training. It's sobering to think of our seemingly long lifetime with this finitude. Oliver Burkeman takes aim at all those productivity and efficiency hacks that we all have used at one time or another. The cold fact is that given our long bucket list of items, there will always be two realities - we won't get everything done and there will be always more we want to add to our bucket list. We live in a FOMO (fear of missing out) world - our wisest choice may be JOMO (the joy of missing out). If we actively decide (and make peace with) what we cannot possibly do, we might find joy in what we can actually accomplish and what we can let go.

As residents in training, your time and your tasks are tightly regulated, and your temporal autonomy is considerably limited. You will spend 30 weeks in the clinic, approximately 24 weeks in critical care and will have 12 weeks of vacation and 12 weeks of elective time. You will have 30 golden weekends minus a few lame duck ones. For each of your weeks you will spend an average of 60 hours at the workplace. You will grapple with patient care, pagers, inbasket messages, epic chat, structured learning time, email, evaluations, timesheets, surveys, modules, scholarly work, and self-directed learning. Somewhere in between all these tasks you will pay bills, fix broken stuff (or arrange to have it fixed). In what is left over, you will spend time in self-care, attention to loved ones and friends and in just living life. Even though there is an intoxicating thrill to living at warp speed, it's overwhelming. We aren't managing time, it's managing us!

In choosing a career in medicine, you, no doubt, gave up many alternative paths. At times, you might regret these lost paths. In tough moments fueled with fatigue and overwork, your mind might consider the "what ifs." For most of us a door closed behind us at some point in medical school and we have forged ahead in this profession. In many ways, now that we made this choice and cannot turn back, our anxiety about the choice we made has fallen away. There is only one path and it's forward. We made an active choice and let's view it as the joy of missing out on all those other choices because in the end we couldn't have done it all, no matter whatever path we chose to follow.

As you progress in your career there will be other choices - fellowships, jobs, relationships etc. NRMP does pose a certain limit on choice - but most of you will match in one of your top 3 fellowship programs or secure a job you had some choice over accepting. Some of you may want to pursue administrative jobs in medicine and a rare few may leave medicine for another career. One of my medical school classmates is a Professor of Anthropology at UT Austin.

If you look back at all the coincidences that brought you to this moment in time and contemplate the unknowability of the future, it should come as no surprise that many spiritual traditions converge on the same advice: that we should focus on the present. If we can let go of our desire to demand certainty of the future, we can be liberated from anxiety and be present now. In [Nine Lies About Work](#), the authors glibly state that the thing we call planning is in reality our assessment of the immediate past. All the same, we all need some assurance that we have a modicum of influence over the future.

Residency training is your "now" and yet it serves as a transient experience like all those others that preceded it. But like every present moment it's valuable all by itself and not just as a vehicle for the destination it's leading you to. I know that there are too many distractions, some necessary, others simply the result of poor systems design that come in the way of being present. My job is to permit you the time and the space to fully experience your 156 weeks of residency training with joy.



Jibe City Windsurfing, Bonaire, Netherland Antilles

I'm in this time warp with you!

Dino Kazi