WELFARE OF ANAESTHETISTS
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP
Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
Australian Society of Anaesthetists
New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists

ANAESTHESIA AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The work of an anaesthetist is rewarding, but it is also both exacting and unpredictable. During the training years work stress and examination stress may be overwhelming.

To minimise these stresses, family care and domestic arrangements must be completely reliable, and flexible enough to cope with last minute problems.

LIFE BALANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Maintain a balance between work and leisure activities at all times, especially during training and examination preparation (see Resource Documents (RDs): RD 01 Personal Health Strategies and RD 06 Training and Examinations).

Work hard at your primary relationship. In the long term it is more important than the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists’ (ANZCA) or other examinations!

Discussing the exact role expected of each partner in the lead up to examinations is useful. You should not just assume that your partner will fulfil the role of chef, housecleaner, shopper, childminder, etc, while you study.

Constant re-evaluation of how the relationship is coping with the stress is needed.

Relationship counselling should be prioritised if deemed by either partner as necessary.

Some couples assign one year to the professional priorities of one partner, the next year to the other partner.
PART TIME AND INTERRUPTED TRAINING

Part time (flexible) training is available for all years of ANZCA training, but significantly lengthens the time taken to complete training. Currently ANZCA training has to be completed in 10 years.


It is unlikely that the longer time frame associated with part time training contributes to degradation in terms of specialist knowledge. There is the probable compensation of a longer exposure to professional learning experiences.

Job sharing is possible, but needs to be negotiated with your department and a fellow trainee. Part time appointments are sometimes hard to arrange with departments and employers, although perhaps less so if you can find someone with whom to job-share

CHILDREN

Decisions as to the timing of adding children to the family are complex. A supportive family and partner are invaluable,

Explore your entitlements for maternity/paternity leave. Take time off following the birth of your children. This is an exciting time, not to be missed!

Breastfeeding/Expressing
Many women find it difficult to continue breastfeeding once they return to work, however it is not impossible. Hospitals should provide an appropriate location. This should be clean and private, with appropriate seating, a power point, appropriate rubbish disposal facilities, and a refrigerator to store milk. The hospital should allow trainees appropriate breaks to facilitate expressing.

Young Children
Having young children is demanding and exhausting for both partners. The joys of this phase include 3 hourly breastfeeding, sleepless nights, hormonal imbalances, and lots of crying (by baby and parents). Studying for examinations is hard enough without these added demands.

Child care outside the home needs careful planning to accommodate the demands of an anaesthetic career: keep your plans flexible, and have a back-up plan, since reliable childcare is essential. Consider a nanny.
Children attending childcare or school do pick up viruses, which are lovingly passed to the parents; they may not be able to access childcare when ill.

Teenagers pose a different set of problems and may need just as much attention as younger children.

Talk to colleagues who have experienced juggling work and childcare, and find what worked for them.

RETURNING TO WORK AFTER A BREAK

The decision to return to work after parental leave may be difficult. It will depend on the state of your family finances, your level of training, or experience as a specialist, and the demands of balancing your public and private work.

Courses are available for those returning to work after parental leave, illness, or leave for other reasons. The “CRASH” course may be available in your region. (ANZCA Bulletin Dec 2013). This course is based on the Royal College of Anaesthetists “Gas Again” course.

ANZCA has a Professional Document for specialists returning to work after a break. (http://www.anzca.edu.au/Documents/ps50bp-2016-guidelines-on-return-to-anaesthesia-pr

You should explore the rules of the relevant regulatory authority on recency of practice. Medical Board of Australia: http://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards.aspx

WORKING PART TIME

Part time work has to be negotiated with individual workplaces. Ensure you know your employment conditions and your entitlements. Private practice may be suitable for those wishing to work part time.

HEALTH

In the public healthcare systems, sick leave and family leave are available. Don’t feel pressured to work if you are sick, or if you have to care for a sick family member.
DOMESTIC HELP

Domestic help is almost essential and must have high budgetary priority. Home helpers must be prepared to take on the full range of childcare and other tasks.

Use any and all available help that is offered to you.

IN CONCLUSION

When you are training, it is often hard to see beyond the study years. Planning for career directions in 5 - 10 years is a very necessary exercise. By then many couples will both be in full time work.

What should the nature and balance of that work be, to give due weight to family activities and personal development?

Talk widely to friends, colleagues, and mentors who have been through these phases already. They may have great advice.

Further Reading

Returning to work after maternity leave. Kushlani Stevenson. ASA 2013
So you want to be a medical Mum ? Dr Emma Hill, OUP 2008
http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/returning_to_work.html

Welfare of Anaesthetists Special Interest Group Resource Documents
RD 01 Personal Health and Strategies
RD 06 Training and Examinations
Returning to work after a period of absence. RCoA, London 2012
http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/node/771
A structured return to work – who, when and why?
CSQ Bulletin 76: 45-7
http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/education-and-events/gasagain-giving-anaesthesia-safely-again-course
http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/training-and-the-training-programme/less-fulltime-training-ltft
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