

Preface

Mothers in Medicine is a group blog by physician mothers, writing about the unique challenges and joys of tending to two distinct patient populations, both of whom can be quite demanding. We are on call every. single. day.

-www.mothersinmedicine.com

On a Friday night in May 2008, my husband and I were driving back home to D.C. after an event. I had recently published an essay “Paying at the Pump” that chronicled my experience as a new mother back at work [1], juggling pumping and my clinical practice. This meant developing an unhealthy relationship with my breast pump and a certain level of mania. I wrote about that time lovingly and with humor, even though it wasn’t nearly as lovely or funny *at the time*. It was often chaotic, trying, and sometimes very lonely.

After the piece was published, my inbox exploded with emails from men and women from around the country, thanking me for writing about a topic they felt was critical but underrepresented in the medical sphere. The outpouring convinced me that we needed more of these stories shared—messy, imperfect stories of women and motherhood and medicine.

I was telling my husband, also a physician, about some of those responses in the car that night when I had an idea. “What about a group blog of physician mothers telling their stories, forming an online community of support?”

We talked through what it might look like. At the time, I wrote a personal blog and contributed to several other blogs. I thought about people I knew from the blogging world who were physician moms. By the time we reached our home, I had already formed the email message in my mind to prospective writers. On Saturday, I sent emails out, some to women I had never talked to or interacted with before but who wrote blogs that I admired. By Sunday, I had already received an enthusiastic “Yes!” from everyone I reached out to. Those women signed on to be the first regular contributors of the group blog, taking a huge leap of faith along with me. That weekend, Mothers in Medicine was born.

The first post was published on May 26, 2008.

“While in high school, I heard that some store managers were suspicious of teens due to shoplifting incidents. Afterwards, I felt guilty whenever just browsing a store with managers in view. I had no reason to feel guilty. I didn’t have sticky fingers. But, somehow, I had already learned to internalize projected judgments of others onto myself.

I get the same slinking feeling whenever I’m leaving work on the early side, taking advantage of getting all of my work done early to get home to spend more time with my children while they’re still awake. Even if I plan to continue doing work after they go to bed, I feel like a shadowy criminal trying to get away with something.

I dread running into people who may look at me with all of my bags and then glance down at their watch. I dread running into a supervisor.

It doesn’t matter if I’m incredibly efficient and productive during my time at work. Or if I’ve worked through lunch scarfing down a sandwich in between keystrokes on the computer. It’s what the hands on the clock read when I’m leaving the building that determine my innocence.”

—KC, “Criminal,” May 26, 2008

From the beginning, my goal of Mothers in Medicine (or MiM affectionately in short) has been to support women navigating motherhood and a career in medicine through the open sharing of our stories. We have had dozens of women who have contributed to the blog as regular contributors, and perhaps hundreds have written guest posts or sent in “MiM Mail” for advice. Regular contributors have spanned an array of specialties and now also include medical students and residents. Writers have shared their vulnerabilities, triumphs, observations, joys, and tragedies over the years to a growing community of readers throughout the world. I have often referred to MiM as a labor of love; we all write and support the site on a voluntary basis. When a reader writes in to say that she only survived medical school or residency by reading our blog or that another reader decided to pursue a career in medicine because of it, it reminds us all of the power of a freely accessible forum of support, that our stories are important.

This book is a natural extension of MiM and aligned with our mission of supporting all mothers in medicine, current and future. In the chapters ahead, our authors, some longtime MiM writers, some new, share insights and wisdom gleaned from their own personal experience as well as drawn from the over 1500 posts and thousands of comments from the community posted to the blog to date on key topics that mothers in medicine face. Selected post excerpts and reader comments are sprinkled throughout the chapters. Chapter 1 starts us off with reflections on the initial considerations when choosing (or being chosen) to become a mother in medicine. The final chapter, “Question and Answer,” synthesizes the collective wisdom shared on the blog in response to the most commonly asked questions we have received over the years. And in between, our authors discuss everything from having children during medical training, to work-life balance, to navigating life challenges such as divorce, to occupational hazards for the mother in medicine. The chapters do not

have to be read in order as readers may be in different stages of their career and motherhood and mentorship; readers can pick and choose as appropriate.

A colleague once asked me, “Why do you share?” It was a general question, an innocent question, asked after he heard about Mothers in Medicine and some of the personal stories I have shared in the medical storytelling space. That question went to the heart of me: why *do* I share? Upon reflection, I believe that sharing our authentic stories, particularly of struggle, of insecurity, of vulnerability, weaves a net of hands by which to catch others who may fall. Shared joys and revelations of meaning in medicine, motherhood, and the intersection of the two can help magnify our purpose and remind us of our blessings. It fuels understanding, empathy, and community. It requires trust, and it breeds trust. I hope in the pages to follow you will find some advice, some guiding principles, and some truth-telling that can support you and lift you up during your journey as a current or future mother in medicine.

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Reference

1. Chretien KC. Paying at the pump. *Ann Intern Med.* 2008;148(8):622–3.



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