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By Stefanie Simmons, M.D.

Like many physicians, my path to emergency medicine took many twists and turns. I began college as a history major, with the goal of being a historian. Then I decided to go to medical school and later accepted a residency in anesthesiology. I did a rotation in emergency medicine, and the rest, they say, is history.

Emergency medicine played off two of my interests: biological science and social science. In EM, we combine the two to develop a plan to treat patients' illnesses while taking into consideration their lifestyles, personal histories, support systems, habits and more.

After marrying my high school sweetheart, I had my first daughter during my internship and my second during residency. It was mid-way through a prestigious fellowship program that I reassessed the trajectory of my career. I realized that a full-time academic career was no longer what I wanted. I made the decision to leave the fellowship because I felt that my life wasn't where I wanted it to be personally and professionally.

While I wanted to pursue an administrative track, I wasn't sure where I'd fit best and make the most impact. I spoke with my regional vice president about my goals. We developed a plan that provided the flexibility that I needed to immerse myself in all aspects of the "business side" of medicine so I could find the best path for me to contribute and grow, while also balancing my other two "jobs" as clinician and mother. I scaled back to 10 clinical shifts a month and attended every meeting at the hospital that I could: department meetings, staff meetings, lean process meetings, patient experience meetings, residency meetings, research committee meetings and more.

This period of exploration led me to a defining decision in my career. I identified a gap in support services for clinicians and spearheaded the development of a comprehensive program to educate and coach clinicians in two pivotal areas: 1) connecting with their patients to provide the best care, and 2) learning how not to lose their passion for medicine while doing it. There are many challenges to having a career in emergency medicine; the key is not losing your heart and soul while trying to help people.

I extensively researched these topics and brainstormed how to create a culture of safety that includes best practices for connecting and communicating with patients to improve bedside care and the patient experience. A secondary but no less important aspect of the program empowers physicians and advanced practice providers to not only recognize the signs of burnout but to take positive steps to address it. Once I had the framework in place, our company's commitment to physician engagement allowed me to implement it. Along the way, I've found a passionate group of like-minded physicians and APPs who volunteer their time and effort to help their colleagues, without whom this program wouldn't work.

I'm proud that this work has evolved into a regional initiative that now includes intensive site visits and performance improvement coaching. Additionally, we've added a needs assessment to the onboarding process to gauge clinicians' social support, and then pair them with another provider for a mentorship program that offers support to struggling clinicians for clinical and social support.

If I work a clinical shift, I may help 12 patients and feel good about what I've done that day, but if I can help a physician treat patients better through coaching, I'm helping every patient she sees throughout the rest of her career.

As physicians we're trained how to diagnose and treat disease, but we learn little about diagnosing and treating ourselves. Through this program, our clinicians learn ways to reconnect to the passion they have for the work and harness ways for it fuel them for the rest of their careers. For women in particular, this often means proactively going after what you want in your career. Women have extraordinary time management skills, which can be a huge benefit for working in the emergency department. We have the opportunity to redefine our specialty.

Female clinicians are involved in the operations of our company, Envision Physician Services (https://envisionphysicianservices.com/?utm_source=feminem&utm_medium=advertorial&utm_campaign=simmons&utm_content=&utm_ locally, regionally and nationally. It's a positive environment that provides mechanisms for providing feedback and making an impact. I've been supported in my pursuit of leadership opportunities and have been able to move and grow my career in a direction that works best for me and my family.

I'm grateful that my company is open and responsive to the needs of its clinicians. Balance is key, and having a company that respects all facets of our lives – both personal and professional – makes attaining that balance much easier.

To view career opportunities at Envision Physician Services, please visit our website (<https://www.emcare.com/careers/clinical-job-search>).

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