

THE WORK-LIFE BALANCING ACT

FINDING HEALTHY EQUILIBRIUM ACROSS A LIFETIME

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Some 30 years ago, I was in a very different phase of my evolution as a doctor, a writer, a mother, and a partner. I was deep in the juggle of family and work, and like many women in that stage of life, I was seeking balance above all. One of the many balls I was juggling was *The New England Journal of Homeopathy (NEJH)*, which my husband, Dr. Paul Herscu, and I launched in 1990 and published through 2000. It was the first peer-reviewed homeopathy journal¹ in the English language.

To help you get a sense of how my balancing act was going, I'll share part of a 1994 editorial I wrote in that *Journal*. This was for an issue devoted to the homeopathic treatment of women's health during menopause and later years:

I sit here about to write this editorial, with my small children tucked safely into bed, snuggled one into the other, three abreast. I think about the impossibility of editing and publishing a journal during the 10:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. shift and the frustration of trying to "fit it all in." Yet, at this time of life, I am defined by motherhood, which determines when I see patients (just one day a week), what I wear (mucus-stained sweatshirt and old jeans), what I listen to (Raffi and Free to Be You and Me), what I read (Grandfather Twilight and Little House on the Prairie), what I do for fun with my husband (go to the local diner, stare at the menu, gasp a sigh of relief that we "escaped"), what I cook (macaroni and cheese—again?), and who I spend time with (a very nice bunch of moms, all suffering to one degree or another with "milk-brain").

We all adore our children. And we put on hold compelling "real" work, outside interests, and spontaneous jaunts downtown or up mountainsides, so we can stay at home (at least some of the time) to do the other "real" work of raising children to be good people.

So, as these articles about women in their later years came to my desk (actually, to my kitchen table cluttered with this morning's cereal bowls and the remains of half-eaten apples), I had to take a deep breath and envision life in the future, without the daily, constant, unending labor of love it is to keep house and raise a family. And slowly, as I began to read the cases and commentaries, I found myself peering into the future—how appealing it all became! The potential of putting my childbearing capacity to rest and nurturing other interests, hobbies, passions, and whims has a lure of its own.

Of course, this potential is not strictly for women who have raised children. For all the women who, by choice

or circumstance, do not raise children but instead pour their souls into relationships, careers, or other worldly interests, there is also a time to look forward to, fulfilling other aspirations which have been stowed away or yet undreamed during younger years.

As homeopaths, it is our charge to offer women in the middle and older years the best possible health so they can enjoy this phase of life. The cultural biases against elders cause many people to stop dreaming and striving for whatever might be fulfilling and exhilarating for them. It is my hope that with homeopathy and other natural medicine, older people might reach their middle and later life full of vigor, inspiration, and self-acceptance... (The remainder of the editorial addressed specific articles in the issue.) Lastly, I would like to dedicate this issue of the Journal to my mother, Doris Cynthia Jaffe Rothenberg, who never lived to know her older years but would have reveled in such a time. She always said, "Only the good die young." How right she was.

Balancing act

Thirty years on, I am so grateful for the work-life balance I was able to create over the span of my long career. Many people are not that fortunate. I see more patients with burnout than ever before. The recent pandemic made everything worse, with social isolation heaped upon already stressful work-life situations.

While it's more common to see parents making an effort to share child-rearing responsibilities these days, the division of labor is typically still not equitable, and the work is unpaid. Creative child care outside the family is both difficult to find and exorbitantly priced, even if the care providers barely make a livable wage. For one of the wealthiest countries in the world, we fall woefully short in ensuring that those taking care of our small ones (or taking care of our elderly and infirm, for that matter) are taken care of too.

Like many women in that stage of life, I was seeking balance above all.

Finding our way

Of course, there are times in life when working hard in a career makes sense. And there are people with particular temperaments who feel called to passionately chase a dream. When such efforts feed the soul, stimulate the mind, and harmonize with physical health, all is well. But when I see a patient who is clearly out of balance between work and the rest of life, I know that something has to give—if they want to maintain or regain their health and well-being.

In these cases, we work together to explore where the person might make changes to free up time and regain balance. Almost always, they will need to reprioritize commitments and reevaluate what is essential in their lives and what is not. Perhaps they can create a new setup for homemaking and caretaking of children, such as getting outside help or leaning on extended family. Maybe they can negotiate a flexible work schedule to cut down on commuting time and allow more work-from-home time. Perhaps they can find a way to stop working overtime and weekends, so they can attend more of their kids' school and sports events. And, with the help of a well-chosen homeopathic remedy, I aim to enhance their ability to set and stick to such articulated boundaries and creative solutions.

What follows is the story of Candace, a long-time patient of mine, who credits homeopathic treatment for helping her maintain balance as she's moved through various stages of life.

Candace aims for equilibrium

Candace first came to me as an exuberant, idealistic woman in her mid-20s. She was set on a career as a social worker and was happy to have found her dream job. She sought my help for frequent colds and upper respiratory infections, which were often accompanied by swollen glands that persisted even when she recovered. She also suffered from persistent anxiety, as well as feelings of insecurity and timidity in many areas of her life.

I prescribed the homeopathic remedy *Baryta carbonica*, as it is often helpful for those with recurrent respiratory infections and tonsillitis, accompanied by large, swollen, hardened glands that linger. People who benefit from this remedy often have anxiety, lack of confidence, and timidity, as Candace did. After homeopathic treatment with *Baryta carbonica*, Candace's respiratory infections became less frequent, her swollen glands subsided, and her feelings of anxiety and insecurity were less pronounced. Over the next few years, she checked in with me periodically and continued to do well with an occasional dose of *Baryta carbonica*.

One step back, two forward

During Candace's first pregnancy and post-partum time, the stress of that experience made her have a bit of a "meltdown." She felt she couldn't do it on her own and wanted her mother



around all the time to help and encourage her. Candace's increased feelings of insecurity and dependency fit the *Baryta carbonica* profile, as people who benefit from this remedy are often more dependent than others their age, needing to lean on parents or authority figures for reassurance, help, and protection. A few doses of *Baryta carbonica* steadied and supported her during this major life transition, for which she was grateful.

After a six-month maternity leave, Candace went back to work for about two years before becoming pregnant again. As soon as she learned she was pregnant, she felt completely overwhelmed. She wondered if she had made a mistake. Caring for her two-year-old daughter before and after work left her tired beyond description. She also seemed to catch every virus her daughter brought home from daycare. *Baryta carbonica* again fit her symptom picture, and it proved helpful in reducing her frequent respiratory infections and supporting her during this second pregnancy. Candace was pleased to deliver another healthy baby girl.

Creative solutions

Within a few months of her second daughter's arrival, Candace realized she did not want to go back to work at six months, as she'd done after her first daughter. It was springtime, and she wanted to be home and outdoors with her children. And the cost of childcare for two kids was expensive. So, we explored how she might manage this, and she decided to talk with her partner about their finances. They found ways to cut back expenses, and

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they also found extra income by fixing up and renting a small apartment in their basement. This made it more manageable for her to be home with the kids.

It wasn't that being home alone with two little ones was easy, of course! In fact, Candace told me that in many ways, going to work was easier because expectations there were clear, and the chaos was much less. But she cherished her time with the girls in their early years.

Once her second daughter turned three, however, Candace decided to return to work. The oldest was now in public school, and the three-year-old could enroll at a public daycare, which made returning to work more affordable. Candace negotiated a plan with her employer to work four longer days a week and have Fridays off.

Something's gotta give

It seemed like a good arrangement at first, but the grind took its toll. Candace never felt she had time for herself or her marriage. The house was a mess, and she felt torn between doing an acceptable job at work and being the kind of mother and homemaker she wanted to be. Her feelings of being

overwhelmed hit a crescendo when her girls got viruses one after another, which meant she had to miss work for the better part of two weeks.

When Candace called me, at her wits' end, we reviewed her symptoms: runny nose, worried about everything, exhausted, anxious about everything, and making lists everywhere. She did not feel insecure or that she couldn't do it, as was typical of her in previous times of stress. Rather, she needed a lifeline and some dependable in-home help. She was not especially irritable or depressed, just overwhelmed with the sheer amount she had to do. She was not childlike or immature in her seeking of support, as she'd tended to be in the past. Instead, Candace had a pronounced "can-do" attitude, while understanding she needed concrete, hands-on assistance.

A constitutional shift

This was a fundamental shift in Candace—which had me looking for a different remedy than her usual one. But *Baryta carbonica* had served her well for so long that it would be unusual for her to need a totally unrelated remedy. So I considered remedies with a relationship to *Baryta carbonica*: *Thuja*, *Silica*, and *Calcarea carbonica*. Candace's garden-variety upper respiratory symptoms could fit any of these three remedies.

People who benefit from *Thuja* or *Baryta carbonica* often lack a clear sense of who they are, which contributes to their insecurity and lack of confidence. While this may have been true of Candace in her younger days, it did not describe her now. Also,

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people needing *Thuja* often have low self-worth and fear that others won't like them if they really get to know them. But Candace couldn't be bothered with that kind of thinking these days—she was more focused on how to get things done.

In people who benefit from *Silica*, we often see physical weakness and fatigue, the feeling of being overwhelmed, and a lack of stamina to get the job done. While Candace was definitely tired, she pushed forward, both on the work and home fronts, so this remedy did not seem to fit either.

A remedy change

In the end, I chose *Calcarea carbonica* for Candace. That intense sense of being overwhelmed and thinking, “if I could just accomplish [this or that task], I'd feel so much better,” really fit her story. Her determination to fulfill her responsibilities and get all the jobs done, her list-making, her problem-solving, and her tenacity all fit *Calcarea carbonica*.

We also spent time together brainstorming how to better share responsibilities with her partner and be very clear about how he could help. He wanted to be supportive, but she realized

she was also a bit controlling. We had a good laugh about how she had asked him to fold laundry, but the way he folded it drove her nuts. I reminded her that, at their core, the best relationships have a posture of letting go!

Feeling free

At our next follow-up visit, Candace told me she'd felt a big sense of relief soon after taking *Calcarea carbonica*. “I feel liberated somehow,” she said. It wasn't that anything ostensibly changed; rather, her perspective had shifted. Candace was cutting herself more slack and taking more time to enjoy the kids. She described one afternoon, for example, when she was able to just look the other way from the big piles of laundry needing to be done, throw the kids in the car, and go have fun at the park. And she'd made a new pact with herself: beyond getting dinner pulled together and having a consistent bedtime routine each night (no small feats!), she was not going to try to get anything else accomplished after 4:00 p.m.

We also talked about food-prep hacks, such as cooking larger amounts and freezing meals, as well as further letting go of expectations about how neat the house should look. Candace

“I feel liberated somehow,” she said.



then moved our conversation to how to have a talk with her husband about a more permanent solution to birth control. While she loved the idea of another child, she knew that a third kid would put her right over the edge.

Stressing less

We met periodically over the next year, and occasional doses of *Calcarea carbonica* continued to support her. Candace felt the remedy improved her sense of calm and acceptance. While life was still a juggle, she felt less stressed. She figured out a way to hire more help around the house, and that eased her load, too. Her frequent colds abated, and she no longer struggled with tender, swollen glands.

Candace remained a list maker, as writing down her “to-dos” calmed her. But she became less demanding about who did the tasks, when they got done, and how they turned out. Loosening her control was a big deal for her. Much of the energy she’d used previously for cleaning and tidying could now go toward being more available for her kids.

Homeopathy across a lifespan

Seeing Candace from her 20s to her 50s gave me a perspective on how homeopathy can support a person across life’s phases and help them maintain balance through the ever-changing work-life landscape. After our first few years of working together, we did not schedule regular appointments, but Candace knew she could always call on me if any physical or emotional challenges came her way.

For years, she was part of the sandwich generation—caring for young children at home and helping her aging in-laws—and *Calcarea carbonica* continued to serve her well, especially if she was overwhelmed at home or at work. Occasionally, Candace needed a different remedy, such as *Belladonna* for an acute flu with symptoms that differed from her usual *Calcarea carbonica* constitutional state. And during a low point in the midst of menopause, she was helped by *Sepia*, a remedy renowned for its usefulness in times of hormonal change. But Candace generally would return to needing *Calcarea carbonica*, which seemed to remain her underlying constitutional remedy.

As her kids grew up, Candace’s and her partner’s earning capacity also grew, enabling her to cut back to a three-day workweek. She was grateful for this good fortune as she considered three days on and four days off to be the perfect work-life balance.

**Candace cut herself more slack,
taking time to enjoy the kids.**

Whenever I see Candace’s name on my list of patients for the day, my heart lifts a bit. We have such history together; I love getting the updates on her girls and hearing about the evolution of her relationship.



Enjoy every day!

As we all know, the only thing permanent in life is change! Now that Paul and I have just welcomed our first grandchild, I have an incredible window into seeing how my own life has evolved over the years, with different emphases on family, work, and community at various times. We may as well try to enjoy the moments we’re in, as they surely won’t last. A well-prescribed homeopathic remedy is often part of the equation of getting to that balance point—and to a place of acceptance and gratitude. 💧

¹Endnote

I had written to the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)* to inquire about their peer review process, and we largely followed the guidelines they sent us. In the same note of response, the *NEJM* also wished us all the best in our efforts to create this new journal. Some years later, the *NEJM* wrote a cease and desist note to us, claiming our journal had “stolen their name.” This was rather silly since they had kindly shared their process and wished us success and because scores of other New England Journal of xyz periodicals existed on the market! We wrote a kind note back, with a copy of their note to us, and never heard from them again!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, has been in practice since 1986 in Northampton, MA, www.nhcmcd.com. Her new book, *You Finished Treatment, Now What? A Field Guide for Cancer Survivors* (Koehler Books, 2022), can be ordered anywhere books are sold. See www.DrAmyRothenberg.com. With her partner Paul Herscu, ND, MPH, DHANP, she founded and teaches through the New England School of Homeopathy, www.nesh.com. Her writing can be found at *Medium*, *Thrive Global*, *The Huff Po*, and more. When not working, Dr. Rothenberg enjoys spending time with her family, in the garden, and on the ballroom dance floor.