

Which Medical Specialties Are Most Friendly to Women Wanting Families?

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Background:

I have chosen to research the topic of specialties for women wanting to be both mothers and medical doctors. I am a junior in high school now, but I plan on going to medical school after I receive my undergraduate degree in college. Although my dream of becoming a doctor is something I would love to pursue, I understand it is common knowledge that doctors have to work an insane number of hours every week, leaving very little time for their family lives. Along with many other young women who dream of becoming doctors, I plan on being a mother someday as well. However, it seems that, with most medical specialties, being an involved mother and a doctor at the same time is nearly impossible. This fact leaves many young women, those in high school like myself, those in college, and those in medical school, with a hard decision: choosing a medical specialty that will give them a chance to be with their husbands and children. That is why I have chosen to research which medical specialties have flexibility, part-time options, and fewer hours requiring women to be “on-call.” With so many options available, I hope to narrow it down to a few of the very best options available.

Research Question:

Which medical specialties are **most** friendly to women wanting families?

Definitions:

- **Medical specialty-** A specialty in medicine is a branch of medical practice. After completing medical school, physicians or surgeons usually further their medical education in a specific specialty of medicine by completing a multiple year residency to become a medical specialist.
- **Radiology-** The science dealing with X-rays and other high-energy radiation, especially the use of such radiation for the diagnosis and treatment of disease.
- **Ophthalmology-** The branch of medicine concerned with the study and treatment of disorders and diseases of the eye.

- **Anesthesiology**- The branch of medicine concerned with anesthesia and anesthetics (drugs given before surgical operations).
- **Dermatology**- The branch of medicine concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of skin disorders.
- **Urology**- The branch of medicine and physiology concerned with the function and disorders of the urinary system.
- **Pediatrics**- The branch of medicine dealing with children and their diseases.
- **Orthopedics**- The branch of medicine dealing with the correction of deformities of bones or muscles.
- **On-call**- Able to be contacted to give professional service if necessary, but not formally on duty.
- **Family (mother) friendly**- Part-time, normal hours, and job flexibility

Review of Literature:

With so many options available, looking for the right medical specialty with a family in mind can be a daunting task. The number of people searching for the right specialty is enormous. However, many medical specialists, nurses, journalists, and countless others have written of their experience and their opinions concerning this topic.

Army Lieutenant Colonel (Dr.) Kent Dezee reports in his article, "Ratings of Specialties' Lifestyles by Fourth- Year US Medical Students with a Military Service Obligation" (2013), that predictable hours, time for family/leisure, and a controllable lifestyle are becoming major factors in the decision-making process regarding medical specialties for US medical students with a military service obligation, and those without. After polling 418 of these fourth-year medical students representing 18 different specialties, Dezee found that the R.O.A.D. specialties (radiology, ophthalmology, anesthesiology, and dermatology) were among the highest rated for lifestyle. 81% of participants in his survey claimed "I want a job with predictable work hours," while 58% said "I chose my specialty because it allowed me to spend more time

with my family.” While many speculate that the R.O.A.D. specialties have the best lifestyles, Dezee believes that his poll “confirms” it.

While not promoting any specialty in particular, Glese Verlander, M.D., J.D., a doctor and a mother of four, emphasizes in her article titled “Female Physicians: Balancing Career and Family” (2004) that it is possible to have it all: a career in medicine and a family. Verlander acknowledges the fact that women have a harder struggle than men when choosing a specialty because of their need to be present at home as well as the office. She believes that the right specialty will not scream out at an individual. “The right balance will vary for each woman and each family, of course, with the time allotment and emphasis likely changing during a woman’s life course,” she writes. Regardless of the chaos, Verlander reminds the reader that the search for the right specialty is well worth it, and so is putting family in consideration. Physicians cannot be motivated to continue without outside support.

In another article “12 Medical Specialties with the Best Quality of Life” (2017), journalist Vuk Zdinjak forms his opinion from recent medically-acclaimed surveys taken earlier this year. He also supports the idea that the specialties with the best quality of life have predictable hours, plenty of vacation time, and room for life outside the office. Considering the burnout rates and overall satisfaction with certain specialty, Zdinjak concludes that ophthalmology is #1 on his list, with the other R.O.A.D. specialties (radiology, ophthalmology, anesthesiology, and dermatology) following closely behind. The specialties that include surgery, such as urology and orthopedics, require a doctor to be on-call often and have more demanding hours. Nevertheless, Zdinjak tells his readers to “Consider the fact that some tough specialties can be worked part time for less money of course, but in that way possibly making a much better work-life balance.”

A 2004 article by New York Times columnist Matt Rytchel “Young Doctors and Wish Lists: No Weekend Call, No Bleepers” mentions that the number of students in want of a specialty with a controllable lifestyle is on the rise. Rytchel really emphasizes the benefits of being a doctor of one of the R.O.A.D. specialties (radiology, ophthalmology, anesthesiology, and dermatology). “In other fields, like dermatology and radiology, doctors can enjoy both more control over their time and a relatively hefty paycheck,” he writes. Rytchel understands that most women want a predictable schedule and a specialty

that will not constantly require being on-call. He strongly advises against specialties that entail surgical operations. Dermatology is on the top of his list of specialties with the best lifestyles. It has controllable hours, large paychecks, and few on-call hours. While dermatology is a highly competitive specialty, according to Ritchel's research, it is one of the best specialties available.

In a fifth article, "Medical Students: What No One Tells You About Anesthesiology" (2015), Karen Sullivan Sibert, M.D., writes of her experience with a specialty that supposedly has an easy lifestyle. Sibert, an anesthesiologist who loves the thrill of high-risk, inpatient surgeries, questions why a specialty like hers is considered to have an easy lifestyle. It is indeed one of the R.O.A.D. specialties (radiology, ophthalmology, anesthesiology, and dermatology). Sibert goes on to explain the crazy number of hours she puts in every week for her job. However, she contradicts herself a bit when she explains how anesthesiology varies in its controllable lifestyle factors. While she considers anesthesiology a high-stress, demanding job like hers, Sibert later explains that there are "boring" anesthesiology jobs out there. Anesthesiologists looking for low-stress surgeries and predictable schedules can work for outpatient surgery centers that have set hours every day. Therefore, although not as thrilling, these surgeries are good options for anesthesiologists who want to work fewer hours than those who are employed at big hospitals. Sibert also mentions the great need for anesthesiologists, something convenient when looking for a job that will hire part-time.

The last article, "Part Time Medicine and the Birth of the New Normal" (2012), written by Dike Drummond, M.D., reports that part-time physicians are becoming more accepted in the medical field: a wonderful step for mothers. Drummond credits this to more women entering the medical field. From 2005-2011, three times more men have become part-time, and 50% more women have become part-time as well. According to a recent survey, Drummond says that 75% of medical offices now allow 4-day work weeks and 30% of offices allow job-sharing. This "new normal," Drummond states, can bring balance, energy, and joy back into a doctor's life. "[Being a part-time doctor can be] everything you might have imagined your life could be when you made your decision to become a doctor in the first place."

Analysis:

The articles all agree on three points about medical specialties. First, all sources can agree on the fact that, in recent years, US medical students have been placing increased importance on lifestyle factors when considering a specialty. This has made available more low-stress and part-time jobs in the medical field. It is also evident from these sources that specialties requiring surgery are the worst options for mothers wanting to work in nondemanding specialties. Finally, all sources consider the R.O.A.D. specialties (radiology, ophthalmology, anesthesiology, and dermatology) as some of the best specialties considering lifestyle factors. Though all the articles concur on these points, there are a few differences. The last article mentions that part-time medical jobs are becoming a “new normal,” while other articles suggest that most specialties require you to be “all in or all out.” The article on anesthesiology reminds the reader that, within a certain specialty, there are high stress options and low-stress options. Overall, though, these sources work together to conclude that there indeed are specialties out there that are well-suited for mothers.

Original Research:**Methodology:**

To further investigate ideas about mother-friendly medical specialties, I interviewed doctors from the four R.O.A.D. specialties- specialties that, from my research, I felt were well-suited for mothers. I also interviewed doctors from two specialties that are not considered easy considering lifestyle: urology and pediatrics. I faxed the following questions over to the offices of the doctors:

Example Survey Questions:

- 1.) Is the specialty you work in family-friendly? Is it easy to have family life and work in your specialty?
- 2.) Do you work more than 40 hours a week? What are the hours you put in per week on average?
- 3.) Are your hours regular business hours (9 a.m.-5 p.m.)?
- 4.) Does your specialty require you to be on-call?
- 5.) Are you able to work part-time in your specialty? Is it possible to be a part-time [specialist]?
- 6.) Would you recommend your specialty for a mother with a family?

Survey Results:

	Family-friendly	40+ Hours	Regular Hours	On-call	Part-time	Recommend For Mothers
Urology Dr. Katherine Voss	No- Husband (Dentist) works less than she does	Yes	No- She performs surgery	Yes	No- There are only 6 female urologists in Indianapolis (2 pediatric)	No- “If you want more work/life balance, there are better professions.”
Dermatology Dr. Wendy M. Wilson	Yes- “Never easy to have a family life and work, however, dermatology does make that possible.”	No- Around 30/wk.	Yes- “As I am self-employed, I can set my own hours. Normally, we work 7:30 A.M.-3:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.”	Yes- However, calls are infrequent and usually just phone calls.	Yes	Yes- “I believe dermatology us a great field for someone who is wanting to have family. As hours can be flexible and you can be part-time.”
Radiology Dr. Susan Meyer (Musculoskeletal)	No- “A balancing act”, has to make “Creative call trades”	Yes- 60 hr.	No- No dayshifts, she works 4:30 P.M.-4:30 A.M.	Yes- But only every other and every fifth weekend, can be at home	Yes- However, it requires full-time on-call responsibilities	Yes- “Very fulfilling”
Pediatrics Dr. Cathy Wagner	Yes	Yes 60-80 hr.	No- 7 A.M.-7 P.M., and more on-call	Yes Calls can be from home often, though	Yes- However part-time means 30-40 hr./wk.	Yes- To mothers who want to work full time

Ophthalmology Dr. Kathryn Haider	Yes	Yes- Only occasionally, mainly 40 hr./wk.	Yes- 7:30 A.M-3:30 P.M.	Yes- But only 3x/yr.	Yes	Yes- She has 3 young children
Ophthalmology Dr. Rod Bucher (Retina Specialty)	Yes	Yes- About 60 hr./wk. with call	No- Surgeries are scheduled at different times with on-call cases, too	Yes- W/a specialty, emergencies happen all the time	No- However, general ophthalmologists can	No- However, general ophthalmology is a great option-set office hours, rarely on-call
	Family-friendly	40+ Hours	Regular Hours	On-call	Part-time	Recommend for Mothers
Anesthesiology Dr. Matt Swift	Yes- Usually bigger groups= more flexibility	Yes- 30-45 hr./wk. + calls from home	No- 6:45-7 A.M. start and end at 3:30 P.M. Unpredictability- doesn't know schedule until night before	Yes- A big part of this specialty. Outpatient centers (rare), don't have call	Yes- Larger groups allow more part-time. Anesthesia-providers are in HIGH demand	Yes/No- Great money and part-time options, but little flexibility

The results from the interviews endorse the R.O.A.D assumption: radiology, ophthalmology, anesthesiology, and dermatology are great specialties regarding lifestyle factors. However, these results also prove that within each specialty, including the R.O.A.D., the lifestyles can vary. Many anesthesiologists, ophthalmologists, and radiologists have unpredictable and demanding jobs that require a lot of surgeries, while others in their specialty may have a much easier schedule. Working for a large group that can share calls, or perhaps at an outpatient center, can be better suited for those like mothers looking to work part-time. The non-R.O.A.D. specialties, urology and pediatrics, do indeed require a lot of devotion, but pediatrics sometimes allows for calls at home and fewer office hours. Overall, dermatology proved to be the best option. Dermatology never has emergencies, and home calls are infrequent. The schedule for dermatology is flexible and part-time options are available. The lifestyles for different dermatologists do not vary as much.

Conclusion:

I found that R.O.A.D. specialties are truly good options for mothers based on both my literature research and my interviews with doctors. However, dermatology proved to be the *best* option. The hours are flexible, controllable, and predictable. There are also few emergencies since dermatologists work only with the skin. The second best option would have to be ophthalmology. General ophthalmologists, those without a certain specialty added, have set office hours and can easily work part-time. These specialties are wonderful for mothers with families. Going into this research project, I was unaware of all the job possibilities regarding medical specialists. I had always wanted to be an OB/GYN, but my opinions changed while doing research for this project. I was unaware of how important it is to consider on-call hours and part-time options within a specialty when planning on being an involved mother. These results proved very helpful to me. I will now consider the R.O.A.D. specialties, namely dermatology, as I choose my medical specialty in the future.

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- 2.) Do you work more than 40 hours a week? What are the hours you put in per week on average?
- 3.) Are your hours regular business hours (9 a.m.-5 p.m.)?
- 4.) Does your specialty require you to be on-call?
- 5.) Are you able to work part-time in your specialty? Is it possible to be a part-time ophthalmologist?
- 6.) Would you recommend your specialty for a mother with a family?