

## Tips from Practitioners on Finding Work-Life Balance

by Communications Staff

November 1, 2005 -- During the first few months of her post-doc at a hospital, Christy Hom, PhD, felt overwhelmed by her work and family responsibilities.

"I was constantly scrambling to find babysitters and rushing to get out of work in time to pick up my kids from daycare before the daycare center closed," says Hom, who was also on call evenings and weekends. "Although I was able to fulfill my responsibilities at work, I was very stressed and exhausted."

Midway through her post-doc year, Hom's program director allowed her to reduce her work week to three-and-a-half days per week by extending her commitment from 12 months to 15 months.

"The extra day-and-a-half off made a huge difference," says Hom. "It allowed me to take care of all sorts of family matters and take my kids to the park one or two days a week. The trade off was that I had to work a lot harder and be much more efficient on the days that I did go to work, but I was a much happier and relaxed person."

Like Hom, many practitioners today are faced with juggling a multitude of demands in their professional and personal lives. From caring for young children and aging parents, to managing new technologies that can keep them "on call" day and night, practitioners are discovering the challenges and the benefits of balancing work, family and other responsibilities in their lives.

When work and family demands conflict with each other, the negative effects may include psychological distress, physiological concerns, decreased work performance and decreased job and life satisfaction. As related to practicing psychologists in particular, research shows that working in isolation and handling others' emotional problems can lead to emotional stress, especially when patient trauma is acute or experienced over the long term (Stamm, 1999).

Roberta L. Nutt, PhD, chair of the APA Board of Professional Affairs' Advisory Committee on Colleague Assistance (ACCA), says that managing stress and finding balance is an essential undertaking for psychologists.

"We all have stress in our lives; that's to be expected," says Nutt, director of the counseling psychology doctoral program at Texas Woman's University. "But if our lives are not balanced, we increase our stress. Work-life balance helps keep us healthy—physically and mentally."

How can practitioners today find balance amid multiple work and life demands? Practitioners recommend the following steps:

### **Incorporate self-care activities into your life**

Nutt recommends that practitioners tap into a variety of self-care strategies involving physical and emotional self-care. Research supports this recommendation by showing that self-care can help create balance and can contribute to good physical and mental health and improved quality of life (Pope & Vasquez, 2005).