



The Man BEHIND THE Successful Woman

Text by Dr Kao Pao-Tang

I often tell new acquaintances that my wife is practically my boss. Sympathetic laughter normally reserved for henpecked men ensues.

“At work”, I would say, as an afterthought.

That surprises them to no end, given that I am 15 years her senior and that we work in the same institution. The conversation can get awkward from then on, given that the only logical explanation is that I am bad at my job and it just isn't cool to talk about it. The topic is then usually changed after a few jokes and some nervous laughter.

You know, it seems like the only reason a woman does better than a man is because the man is bad at it. The fact that woman can be just

as, if not more, competent as men, is seemingly lost to many.

But my wife is. A fact blessedly not lost to others as well.

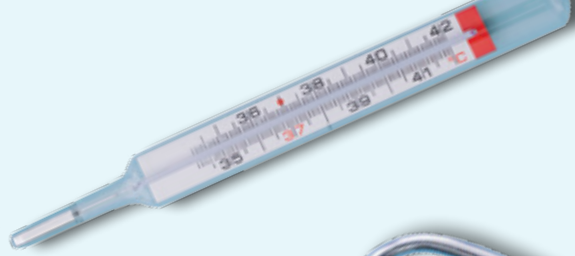
Nevertheless, being good at one's job isn't necessarily easy. We've all been through it. Those of us who survived the grind – that is traineeship – got spat out at the end in some semblance of the intended finished product, often slightly damaged. While those of us seniors love expounding the horror stories of our traineeship, those stories pale in comparison to what I witnessed in my wife's own journey. The process is infinitely harder when you are a woman trying to build a career and a family at the same time.

The fact is that time is a rapidly diminishing resource when you

are building a family. First comes the planning of one's wedding. Following that, pregnancy takes so much out of you that whatever meaningful amount of sleep you get barely re-energises you. Add to that the traineeship rules that penalise you if you fall short of clinical service hours or the number of calls till the third trimester. God forbid if you even attempt to take your membership examination in the middle of all these.

And yet she did.

Mind you, she isn't infallible. Wonder Woman she isn't. She attempted her first membership two weeks before giving birth to our first child. She was so stressed out during the entire pregnancy that



she had to be induced at 37 weeks due to oligohydramnios and a case of intrauterine growth restriction. However, she went on to eventually pass her membership after two further tries, all while going through the trials of being a first-time mother.

Yet she has since gone through two more pregnancies, while maintaining a full-time clinical service, completing her traineeship and beyond.

So what have I, the husband, done to support her in achieving all these? While not one to shy away from my role as a husband and father, I haven't had to do anything remotely self-sacrificial. The fact remains that many of her roles cannot be performed by someone else, and even if they could be, she would be

reluctant to relinquish them. One of the challenges that she faces daily is how to allocate her limited resources among her ever-expanding roles.

The truth is that the solution is nothing tangible, I am afraid. It's just support.

Surely, being in the same specialty counts towards something. She seeks solace in knowing that I am intimately familiar with the challenges she faces at work, and bad days need no explanation. She is able to reaffirm her commitment to her causes, knowing that I believe likewise. From time to time, she gets the gentlest of nudges in the right direction when she is feeling less than motivated.

From that, she has gone on to do great things. ♦

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Legend

1. Family portrait taken during Dr Ooi's birthday celebration with our "extended family" – colleagues from NUHKids