

Navigating Moonlighting Opportunities During Dermatology Training

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PRACTICE POINTS

- Dermatology training demands extensive study and hands-on skill development, which need to be balanced with family time, finances, and self-care.
- Before moonlighting, ensure it will not compromise your family's quality of life or your core residency/fellowship commitments and that your program's policies permit it.
- Carefully assess logistics to determine if an after-hours or weekend clinic can be a financially viable moonlighting opportunity.

Residents and fellows face intense demands on their time and finances, where resilience is more realistic than perfect balance. Moonlighting can provide extra income and valuable clinical experience but must be weighed against core training commitments, program policies, and other factors such as office availability, staffing, overhead costs, patient demand, and no-show rates. This article outlines some key factors to consider when embarking on such a decision, including the effects of moonlighting on other commitments and logistics to consider.

Residents and fellows in training have to navigate time management to balance reading, hands-on training, family responsibilities, exercise, diet, and sleep requirements. In addition, they grapple with the stress of financial commitments for food, housing, clothing, family members, transportation, and student loans. A brilliant friend of mine once said that she struggled throughout residency and her early career to find balance until it finally occurred to her that, while balance was

aspirational, resilience was key. All that said, residents in training may find it appealing to earn a little extra money and gain additional clinical experience through moonlighting. This article discusses some key considerations when embarking on such a decision, including the effects of moonlighting on other commitments and some logistical factors to consider.

Will Moonlighting Adversely Affect My Other Commitments?

Residency and fellowship are precious opportunities to gain medical knowledge, hone your ability to make diagnoses through complex pattern recognition, and refine the necessary surgical and interpersonal skills to carry you through a successful career. Dermatology encompasses a vast array of conditions related only by their manifestation in skin. Dermatology residents and fellows may spend fewer sleepless hours on call, but the reading requirements are massive. Our treatment armamentarium has expanded rapidly with highly effective treatments for chronic conditions that have a dramatic impact on quality of life. With so many effective agents available, the choice often relates as much to comorbidities as to disease severity and location. There is so much to learn.

While making a full commitment to acquiring the skills of an expert clinician, it is important for residents to remain aware of those who depend on you—in particular, the fleeting time you have with your growing children. They grow up fast, and your interactions with them determine who they will grow up to be. In the past, salt, silk, gold, and jewels were the world's greatest luxuries. Now, it's *time*—time with family, time for self-care, time to reflect, and time to rest and renew. Be careful how you squander time in exchange for material possessions.

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What Logistical Factors Should You Consider When Embarking on Moonlighting?

There are clearly stated policies from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education for when moonlighting can occur during training.¹ It should not occur during typical residency or fellowship work hours, and the individual must be in good standing academically and progressing well on their journey to becoming a competent dermatologist. They must also have the appropriate skills to practice in the field of medicine chosen for moonlighting.

Moonlighting opportunities may exist in the form of emergency department or “quick clinic” coverage, especially for the evaluation and treatment of acute minor illnesses. Fellows who have completed a dermatology residency may supervise dermatology residents in after-hours or weekend clinics, offering enhanced opportunities for autonomy, additional clinical experience, and some welcome cash. To make such clinics viable, the office space must be available; the building must be open; and the costs of the space, scheduling, reception, and security services must be covered as well as nursing support (which should be voluntary and likely will require overtime pay scales). After all of these—as well as supplies—have been paid for, what is left is what is available to distribute as pay for service. Working through these factors provides valuable experience in resource management and helps prepare trainees for the economic realities of private practice. Large organizations may be able to provide the space and support, but all of that needs to be paid for through the proceeds that come from the patient care provided. No-show rates often are quite high for after-hours and weekend clinics, but the expenses for those unfilled appointment slots remain and must be paid in full. Be sure the demand exists and that you plan appropriately with strategic overbooking based

on historical data on patient mix, procedural needs, and no-show rates.

My department has supported resident and fellow requests for moonlighting opportunities in the past. The most successful model was to have a limited number of early morning appointment slots prior to the start of morning didactics. Security typically already exists, rooms are available, and patients can be seen and still get to work or get their kids to school. No-show rates remained very low for morning appointments, and strategic overbooking was unnecessary.

In contrast, evening and weekend clinics start out strong with high patient satisfaction and deteriorate fairly quickly with accelerating no-show rates. People are busy at the end of the day, and unforeseen circumstances often affect their ability to keep an appointment. Weekends are precious; potential patients may be less schedule minded in the evenings and on weekends, and the residents and fellows themselves often find it stressful to commit to giving up a chunk of weekend time on a scheduled basis.

Before you commit to a moonlighting job, be sure to weigh all of the above factors and be sure the juice is worth the squeeze.

Final Thoughts

Moonlighting opportunities are a way to acquire both clinical and management skills and can provide a welcome extra bit of cash to ease financial burdens, but these benefits should be balanced with other time commitments and overall quality of life. Time is precious—choose wisely and be sure you spend it well.

REFERENCE

1. Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. Common Program Requirements (Residency). Updated September 17, 2022. https://www.acgme.org/globalassets/pfassets/programrequirements/cprresidency_2023v3.pdf