

# On Surgical Inspiration, Mentorship, and Managing Life as a Resident: An Interview with Prathima Nan

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**Interview with Prathima Nandivada  
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## ***What motivated you to choose a career in surgery?***

What I think motivates most people to go into any field is the mentors that they have, and I think a big reason why I chose to go into surgery was being inspired by the mentors around me, both men and women. Early on in medical school, I just had a couple of mentors that exemplified what it meant to be a physician -- they could take care of any problem, were great teachers and great leaders, and I essentially just wanted to be like them, and so I decided to pursue a career in surgery, and it's been a fantastic journey.

## ***What do you find enjoyable about being a member of AWS?***

I've been a member of the AWS since I was a medical student. And the things I love most about coming to these conferences is meeting women in every stage of their career who are thriving and seeing how they are accomplishing their goals. It's extremely motivating and inspiring to see that. And I think the other side of it is the tremendous opportunity to meet mentors. I've had opportunities to plan these meetings, get involved in programs at my own residency, and I think it gives you a small network of people that you can get to know well and really learn from.

## ***You've spoken about the importance of finding a mentor. How would you advise students on how to find a good mentor?***

The key to finding a good mentor is putting yourself out there. It can't be overemphasized how important it is to get involved with societies, get involved with networks within your own hospital, and then get involved with national societies where you get to meet with people all over the country. The goal of finding your mentor is finding someone you really resonate with. And the likelihood you are going to find someone like that is related to how much you go out there and meet people. So I think it's certainly great when your residency has built in programs to help you find mentors in your own institution, but the second step is really taking your own initiative to contact people. I have never run into a situation where I have e-mailed someone and asked for help and haven't received at least some direction. So I think it's about making yourself available.

## ***What have you found to be beneficial in terms of balancing your professional and relationship/family life?***

Being a woman in surgery comes with its set of unique challenges. I think that's part of what I've benefited most from being in AWS is talking to women who have been through these challenges before I have and gaining from their insights. It is certainly possible to have a personal life and be a female surgeon. I have been married for two years, so I'm still a newbie, but I think the key for our

relationship and for most that I have seen be successful is communication and honesty. I think if you really make clear what your commitments to work are and where you are flexible, it makes your partner have reasonable expectations about what they can get from you. I think the second part is really when you're home and you've decided to be home, be home. Put the work away. Letting the people in your life, whether it's a spouse, family member, or friends, know that they're important to you, even if your time is limited, is making the time count. Certainly discuss your career choices with your partners, friends, and family so that they are aware of why you are choosing what you are choosing, why it's important to you, and how it's going to affect them, because it will.

***What do you enjoy about going to national conferences like the AWS Conference?***

Getting involved in national conferences is critical to succeeding in academic medicine. Not only because it's a great opportunity to learn about the scientific advances but because it's an opportunity to meet people who are doing what you are doing and doing it well. The AWS is a great network among the national networks because it also narrows it down to women who are doing well what you are doing. So I think it's important for medical students and residents to come to these meetings to see the possibilities, the range of careers that you can have, and find people who will help you achieve that. It's important to get the broad perspective. If you just stay at your own institution you will only see things one way. So get out there, go to the meetings, meet people, and enrich your minds with all the possibilities!

*This interview was conducted at the AWS National Conference in Chicago, Illinois on September 30, 2012, by Ginger Slack, 4th year Medical Student at UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. This document is a transcript with the exception of editing for grammar.*