Tips for Balancing CAP Committee Work

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**Becca Battisfore:**

Welcome to the latest edition of the College of American Pathologist CAPcast. I'm Becca Battisfore, Content Specialist with the CAP. On this episode, I'm joined by three CAP committee members who will share their experience and advice on balancing committee work alongside their other professional and personal responsibilities.

Before we get into the questions, how about you introduce yourselves? Dr. Bentz?

**Jessica Bentz, MD, FCAP:**

Good morning, Becca. Thanks for inviting me to join you today. My name is Jessica Bentz, and I'm an assistant professor of pathology at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire. My specialties are gynecologic and genitourinary pathology, and I'm on the CAP's Reproductive Medicine Committee.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Great. Dr. Mirza?

**Kamran Muhammad Mirza, MD, FCAP:**

Hi, Becca. Thanks for having me as well. My name is Kamran Mirza. I am an associate professor of pathology and medical education, a hematopathologist and the fellowship director for Hematopathology Fellowship here at Loyola University Chicago's Stritch School of Medicine, and I am on the HPATH Committee.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Great. And Dr. Mahmood?

**Muhammad Nausherwan Mahmood, MD, FCAP:**

Hi, Becca. How are you doing? My name is Muhammad Nausherwan Mahmood. I'm a clinical professor at the University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton. I have been practicing for 18 years as a consultant, surgical pathologist, and dermatopathologist.

My professional interests include developing and providing dermpath training to pathology and dermatology residents. I'm also involved in provincial and local multidisciplinary cutaneous tumor teams to create diagnostic and therapeutic guidelines. Currently, I'm a member of the CAP Member Engagement Committee.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Thank you. Thank you all for joining me. And so let's get right into the questions. What drew you to joining the specific committee that you're on, Dr. Bentz?

**Jessica Bentz, MD, FCAP:**

I became interested in the CAP pretty early in my residency, when I was a first-year resident. My chief was a CAP delegate, and he encouraged me to attend the Residents Forum. And as he predicted, it was a wonderful experience.

I met a lot of residents, fellows, and attending pathologists. I was able to talk to people with different institutions, and network with pathologists from both academic and private environments. Which was great, because as a new resident, you're trying to figure all of that out. So it was a wonderful opportunity.

And after the Residents Forum, I went home and looked at the list of committees. And at the time, I knew I was interested in women's health, specifically. So when I saw the Reproductive Medicine Committee, it seemed like a natural committee for me to apply to. I applied and was accepted, and I joined as a junior member.

I remained a junior member for a few years, and then I became the vice chair. And now, I'm the current chair. So I've been on it for a while, and it's been a great experience overall.

**Becca Battisfore:**

And Dr. Mirza?

**Kamran Muhammad Mirza, MD, FCAP:**

Similar to Dr. Bentz, I think that I also became very interested in volunteering for committees for the CAP early on. It took a couple of tries to get in. And I think that what's drawn me, really, is that I see the benefit of what the committee work is, on the other side, as a practicing pathologist.

For the HPATH cases specifically, I think the HPATH is an incredible CAP product. And I've always had our residents and fellows use it and encouraged my colleagues to use other similar products of the CAP as well.

And I think that for me, primarily, it was the ability to intervene in those products and create those products and be part of that legacy. I think that was very intriguing to me.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Great. And Dr. Mahmood?

**Muhammad Nausherwan Mahmood, MD, FCAP:**

For me, serving on a committee is all about personal and professional growth and development. Working in a committee allows you to share ideas with a cohort of diverse individuals.

A significant incentive for me to join was to sharpen and update my leadership skills. And working in a good committee can be like doing a hands-on leadership training program. A CAP committee, like the Member Engagement Committee, can provide a perfect platform from which we can collaborate towards a common goal.

As a physician leader, working effectively in teams, solving problems, driving initiatives, and adequately representing a larger group of stakeholders, is critical. I joined because I sensed that serving on the CAP committee would likely provide me with all these opportunities.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Great. The next question is what kind of work do you do for the committee? We'll get into the nitty gritty of it, and I'll start with Dr. Mirza.

**Kamran Muhammad Mirza, MD, FCAP:**

For the CAP HPATH Committee, our job is to create the HPATH product. It's an incredible job, where we get together and assign different topics to the committee members. This is done with looking at past products and past successes of different cases.

And as hematopathologists, as practicing experts of this, our job is to create an incredible, very interactive piece of hematopathology that comes forward as one of the HPATH cases.

The work involves not only identifying the correct cases, but then obviously making sure that the correct people are doing them. And then there's a significant amount of peer review where we not only write the cases, but we also peer review the other cases that our colleagues have done. And that ultimately goes into the publishing steps.

So there's a lot of granular work at the level of establishing a case, and making sure that that case is worthwhile to be a CAP product.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Great. And Dr. Mahmood?

**Muhammad Nausherwan Mahmood, MD, FCAP:**

For Member Engagement Committee, my involvement and interaction with the committee are in two ways.

The first is via three face-to-face meetings every year. The second is working outside the meetings, usually through email communications and Zoom. During these interactions, I have collaborated with other members on initiatives like developing peer-to-peer mentorship program for early-career pathologists; oversee, review, and become part of the nomination panel of the CAP Meritorious Awards Program; develop the first-timer session at the CAP annual meeting to help orient participants; volunteer in CAP user experience study; discuss strategies to engage and retain early-career members; and, develop new membership categories.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Great, thank you. Dr. Bentz, as a new chair of the committee, what kind of work do you do? Or will be doing?

**Jessica Bentz, MD, FCAP:**

As the chair, you're showing up, you're participating in the meetings. You're very engaged in meetings, just as all the other members are. But there are additional responsibilities.

The Reproductive Medicine Committee, we promote reproductive medicine. We have a really unique group, because we have directors of reproductive labs and we have pathologists. So it's a unique group of members, and we provide CE activities related to sperm morphology and technologies in reproductive medicine. We evaluate semen analysis and embryology surveys. And as the chair, we are responsible for attending additional meetings.

Our committee meets three times a year. But in addition to that, the chair will attend leadership meetings. We will review the applications for the committee, and we work very closely with our committee manager. I'm very fortunate; our committee manager is wonderful, as she knows the ins and outs of everything.

We'll look at the applicants and decide who will best fit into the committee. And then we'll review if any disclosed conflicts of interests of the members. And we decide, "Are any of these disclosed conflicts of interest significant? Do they need to be addressed? Will this member potentially need to be recused from voting or discussion?" So that's a big part of the chair's responsibilities before the meetings.

We will also work with the committee manager to identify what's the best location for our meeting, based on our budget and the number of members on our committee. Which hotel will work best for us? Where are we going to dinner? The little things that are exciting as well, which are great for being a part of the committee.

Then I think, in my personal opinion, the chair has an additional responsibility of taking a look at the members. What are the strengths of our members? And how can we optimize on these strengths to provide more, given our members' interests and knowledge? A few years ago, we created a semen analysis benchtop guide, which was a great product, optimizing on the resources that the different members were bringing to the table.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Great. Work-life balance can mean something different to everyone. So I'd like to hear everyone's perspective on it, and how you define work-life balance in your own life. Dr. Bentz, let's start with you.

**Jessica Bentz, MD, FCAP:**

For work-life balance, in my opinion, it really requires a constant accommodation to one's changing schedule, a constant reevaluation of one's own personal goals and career goals.

I think, going through a typical work week ... I have two small toddlers, so my work outside of work is also pretty busy. But I would say you get to work, you sign out with the residents. I look at my emails and say, "Okay, what needs to be addressed right now? What can I address later?"

I sign out with the residents. And then during lunch, I'll usually sit and go through the emails that need to be addressed. I'll look at anything that has to be done for the committee. Do we need to give a draft for an upcoming CE activity? Is there anything that the committee manager needs from me in regards to upcoming meetings?

And usually sign-out cases the rest of the afternoon, then go home and start the bedtime routine with the kids ... then all over again the next day. So I would say that my work-life balance has changed a bit from what it was before I had kids. But you find a way to make it work. You find a way to really balance what you want from your career, in addition to and coordinated with, what you want outside of work. And you can make it work as long as you approach it with a fluidity every day.

**Becca Battisfore:**

And making the most of every moment you have. Dr. Mirza?

**Kamran Muhammad Mirza, MD, FCAP:**

Yeah, it's difficult to follow up from Dr. Bentz. She said it so well.

I think that work-life balance for me is, I think of it as life-life balance. I think work is part of my life. And so I think the way I approach it is that in life, there are things that deplete energy, and things that replete energy. And we need to just be able to find a balance of what repletes us and what depletes us. And I think that that's different for different people. Some might think that committee work is a depleter versus a repleter. And depending on that, you can make a whole bunch of decisions. And so a typical work week for me is also pretty busy.

I have three kids. My wife is a pulmonary critical care physician; we have hectic schedules. But we've, over the years, managed ... at least tried to manage ... different things. And I think work is, again, part of life in that sense. And I think that for me personally, I don't mind checking email once in a while, even when I'm at home. As long as it isn't bothering with family activities, it doesn't deplete me to do that. I know some people like to just completely disconnect. So I think ultimately, you just have to find the balance that works for yourself, and try and keep balancing it as life changes.

**Becca Battisfore:**

I like that phrase you used: "life-life balance." Dr. Mahmood?

**Muhammad Nausherwan Mahmood, MD, FCAP:**

For me, the work-life balance term needs to be more specific. I make it more practical and granular by dividing into work-work balance and life-life balance. Balancing committee work within my professional life comes under work-work balance. I like to divide my career as a pathologist into five main parts. They are clinical service, teaching, research, quality improvement, and administration. This allows me to distribute and organize different aspects of my professional life. It helps me to become aware of any deficiencies or over-commitments. Once I've signed up for a set number of activities, I do not volunteer anymore. This way I'm not overwhelmed, and actually look forward to and enjoy my work.

CAP committee work comes under the administrative category. In a typical workday, I am on full-time clinical service daily, which leaves little room for anything else. However, every day I made a habit that I keep one hour reserved for non-clinical work. For example, I'm doing this podcast in my non-clinical hour today. For life-life balance, I divide it as well. I mean, I need specific places in my mind for different things. So I divide life-life balance as well into family time and me time. As a rule, I don't do any office-related work once I'm home. I'm that sort of a guy who likes to completely disconnect.

**Becca Battisfore:**

That's great. You keep that all very compartmentalized, which leads me to the next question. What advice would you give to someone considering joining a CAP committee, but isn't sure if they can find the time? I'll start with you, Dr. Mahmood.

**Muhammad Nausherwan Mahmood, MD, FCAP:**

Well, I'll say go for it. The time commitment is manageable and can be easily incorporated into your routine. The face-to-face meetings are on weekends, so you do not have to take any extra days off from work. The meetings are currently hybrid, in-person and virtual, so you can still join the discussion if you are busy and cannot travel.

The experience is, without a doubt, worth all the effort. Working on a CAP committee will broaden your exposure and aid your professional growth. Being part of a committee will help increase your awareness regarding emerging trends and challenges in our field. It'll provide you with perfect opportunities to network, and contribute to advance and advocate for our specialty.

The experience can benefit early career, mid-career, or experienced pathologists alike. You can be a member of CAP, or you can be an engaged active member. And one of the best ways to become an engaged, active, involved member is to join a committee.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Wonderful. And Dr. Mirza?

**Kamran Muhammad Mirza, MD, FCAP:**

I like that. Dr. Mahmood is doing his committee work in the Engagement Committee by making us all more active engaged members. I love that. I also serve with him on the Member Engagement Committee, so he gets five stars for that advice. I think that that's wonderful.

I fully agree with him. I think that you should definitely go for it. Life has completely changed in the pandemic, and I think one of the post-pandemic benefits; one of the few silver linings is that the hybrid option really does give a tremendous amount of flexibility for people to be able to join in multiple different ways. And I think that that has really changed the way you think of the time commitment.

Obviously, many of us have children; we have other things happening. So I have definitely benefited from the fact that we can do hybrid meetings: with balancing some weekends when I'm at home in the meeting and can still do something with the kids in the evening, versus a complete disconnect.

But I think that like any other thing in life when you are weighing the pros and cons of being part of something; I think in this particular setting, if you have an opportunity, the pros way outweigh the cons; just the networking, the collegiality. I feel like my committee members are like my family members.

It's an incredible way to volunteer for an organization that really is our voice, our professional voice in multiple ways. And so I think it's definitely worthwhile.

**Becca Battisfore:**

It's a great ringing endorsement for committee work. Dr. Bentz?

**Jessica Bentz, MD, FCAP:**

Yeah, I have to agree 100%. Especially when Dr. Mirza says it's like a family. I mean, I've been a part of the Reproductive Medicine Committee since I was very early in my residency. I look forward to the meetings, I look forward to seeing everyone; it's just a wonderful opportunity.

And I would say to anyone who's considering joining a committee, you can also look at the CAP website under Member Resources, Council Committees; there's a complete breakdown of each of the committees.

It tells you how many hours approximately may be required for a member versus a vice chair versus a chair. What are the expected activities? What's the charge of the committee? So you can get a better understanding of the time obligation for one committee versus another. And if it's something that you're really interested in, there's also a list of all the members.

So if you're still not quite sure if it will fit, or maybe what the committee will be doing at the meetings, then I would recommend emailing the chair or contacting the committee member and getting more information on it, so that you can determine if it's right for your schedule.

But absolutely, if given the chance, I would do it all over again. It's been a wonderful experience, and I hope to stay with the CAP committees throughout my career.

**Becca Battisfore:**

Awesome. That's great advice. And I want to thank you all so much for joining and sharing your committee experience, especially as we've talked about trying to balance everything we all have going on in our lives.

And I want to thank you all for listening to this CAPcast. The application for 2024 committee appointments is open until April 28th, 2023. For more information about joining a committee and to apply, visit cap.org.