

PROFILE



TEXT BY

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Dr Jonathan Tan is currently an orthopaedic resident at the National University Health System. A dwarf in a department of giants, his hobbies include falling asleep while studying, resubmitting rejected journal articles and trying to not stutter during morning teachings. He is grateful for the opportunity to pursue his dreams and hopes to become a good orthopaedic surgeon and help educate future trainees. He is thankful for the love and support of his parents and wife, without which none of this would be possible.

We had always agreed that four was the magic number. I have two siblings and my wife has four, so we compromised and agreed we'd have four kids. I have always loved children and had at one point wanted to be a paediatrician. That was until I attended my first paediatric nephrology round and realised that I didn't quite have the brainpower or calculating skills needed, so I decided to pursue a different path.

However, one does not simply promise multiple grandchildren at one's wedding without being constantly reminded about it, and I knew my wife and I had

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a lot to live up to. Babies, however, were the furthest thing from my mind when I returned home a month after our wedding. It had been a long day in a heavy lead gown and I did not expect my wife to greet me at the door with a surprise. Perhaps X-rays really are bad for brain cells, because I did not quite grasp what the strange plastic device with the red lines meant. It was not until I saw the tiny pair of shoes next to it that the penny finally dropped: I was going to be a father. My wife likes to claim that I teared up at the thought of being a father, while I'd like to believe that it was the onset of a previously undiagnosed adult allergy that brought the tears to my eyes.

The first trimester was hard on the both of us. While she had to juggle running a busy psychiatric ward, her examinations and a baby with an amazing knack for causing morning sickness, I had my own bout of adjustment disorder. I had never had problems with my working hours before or any doubts that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life; but for the first time, doubt crept in. *Did I really want to be closing up a wound at 9 pm, miss dinner with my wife and not know how she and the baby were doing? What else would I miss in the future?* Needless to say, I was not my most cheerful or enthusiastic self for those few months.

However, there were happy moments too, like the first time I heard my child's heartbeat on the ultrasound, and that magical moment when he began to take on a discernibly humanoid appearance on the screen. The adjustment disorder improved as the morning sickness of the first trimester was replaced by the glow of the second, and I gained a different perspective. Usually, I'd be asking my bosses how to fix fractures or

write papers, but for the first time, what I really wanted to know was how they managed to juggle being a good father, surgeon and researcher/educator. It made for some good and some awkward conversations, but it gave me hope that I could put my family first and still be a good surgeon at the same time.

Of course there was still the small matter of finding out if the baby was a boy or girl. Unfortunately, the baby decided to use his femurs to hide his gender from the earlier ultrasound and it wasn't till Father's Day, deep in the second trimester, that I found out he was going to be a boy. At the risk of sounding like an MCP (not metacarpophalangeal joint, but male chauvinist pig), I'd always hoped that my first child would be a boy. Finally, someone just like me but better; maybe he'd win a rugby gold medal for my alma mater; maybe he'd become a prefect like his grandfather had wanted; or maybe he'd publish in *Cell* or *Nature* one day and not write non-peer-reviewed articles like his father. Of course, my wife, being more sensible (and well-read in child psychiatry), advised me that this was far too much pressure to place on the shoulders of a little boy, and I scaled down my expectations to him being a happy, filial and kind human being. Although I did ask her why he couldn't be all of the above at the same time...

And now, the countdown to his birth day begins. I wonder each day if each kick is a harbinger of contractions. The cupboard is packed with tiny baby clothes and his room with a cot, a pram and boxes full of diapers and wet wipes. I'd always thought that becoming a doctor was pretty cool, but I had not realised that there was a job even better than that — and so my watch begins. ♦