

Surfing Through the Night Shift

in Brooklyn, New York James Burhop, DO

For me, pediatric emergency medicine is just like surfing.

I surf.

I like the feel of the water as it flows over my body and the sound of the waves crashing as they break and slide along the shore. If I could do only 1 thing with my time, it would be to sit atop my 9'0" Harbour Habanero just outside the break during a southwest swell at Third Point, Scorpion Bay, catching that perfect glassy wave.

But I have a family—2 amazing kids and a beautiful wife—and like most of us I need a job, one that will buy food, clothes, toys, and Sticky Bumps surfboard wax. As such, if I could have only 1 job, it would be to work as a pediatric emergency physician.

For me, pediatric emergency medicine is just like surfing. I check the tide charts, forecasts, and surf cameras at length, but it is not until I am paddling out toward the break that I have a true sense of the power of the swell. Each set holds surprises, and while many waves are caught and carved with grace, some waves come along with a crushing force that is much heavier than initially anticipated. When this happens, I adjust quickly. Often, these subtle movements are made instinctively, using muscle memory that has developed during years of practice and perseverance. Similarly, waves of patients wash over our emergency department here in Brooklyn during every shift, some with common complaints that I can remedy swiftly and

others with more perplexing problems that require quick thinking and the confidence to initiate treatment prior to knowing the results of all laboratory work and imaging.

Emergency medicine is athletic, and like surfing, it requires both patience and action. When our emergency department gets busy, it can get chaotic very quickly, not unlike the packed lineup at my weekend break on Far Rockaway. Both situations require mental and physical discipline and the ability to keep a keen eye on the ever-changing surroundings. I loathe the busy break, but I enjoy the challenge of an unpredictable emergency unit and possess the patience required to treat the ill children and soothe their parents. As a surfer and an emergency physician, I have learned how to think on my feet, to show kindness in the face of disrespect, and to identify fear disguised as anger.

I surf, I teach, I heal.

From the pediatric emergency fellowship program at Eastern Virginia Medical School and The Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters in Norfolk, Virginia. Before beginning his fellowship program, Dr Burhop was a resident at Maimonides Infants & Children's Hospital in Brooklyn, New York (2009-2012) and a teacher at Bushwick High School for Social Justice in Brooklyn (2002-2005).

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