



Jordan D. Frey

Money Matters in Medicines

Managing Personal Finances
as a Physician

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This book is dedicated to all healthcare professionals aiming to improve their well-being, and that of their patients

Preface

Ever heard of a poor physician? I hadn't until I was one.

Ever thought that becoming a doctor meant automatic financial security? I did until all that came with my degree was debt.

Ever wonder why some doctors seem to have it all while you're trying to dig yourself out of a hole? I did until I figured out how to build my way out.

If you can relate to my struggles, then this book is for you...

Until recently, I had experienced all these thoughts. I was in my 7th year of surgical training after medical school when I realized that I was experiencing symptoms of burnout. I found it more difficult to remember why I had gotten into medicine. My medical experiences were feeling more and more depersonalized. Further, despite winning external awards and publishing prolifically, I didn't feel like I was accomplishing anything.

Realizing that I was experiencing burnout was eye-opening and quite difficult to come to grips with. Many of you may share a similar experience. It took some time, but I finally began to reflect on what was at the root of my burnout. Not surprisingly, there were many items on the list. But one kept coming up at the top...and that was money.

Here I was, at the end of my training, and finally about to become an attending plastic surgeon. Everyone was congratulating me and telling me that things were finally going to be "all good." I would finally be making good money now!

However, I didn't feel like things were all good at all. I had nearly \$500,000 in student loans, credit card debt, no savings, and no investments. I had a wife and two young children. Even more, I felt pressure in becoming an attending to start collecting the items that defined (in my mind) a doctor. Things like a fancy car, huge home, custom suits, and big watches. So yes, I was finally going to make more money. But I could already feel this money evaporating into more and more debt. There didn't seem to be a way out. And I felt suffocated. This was not how I wanted to feel after all my years of sacrifice and hard work.

However, with this root cause now defined, I could act. Like so many doctors, I had actively ignored my finances—saying things like, "Money doesn't matter." I

knew I made tons of financial mistakes. But they were too scary and intimidating for me to look at. Now was the time to change that.

So, my wife, Selenid, and I decided to learn about personal finance and get our finances under control. Unfortunately, this was quite challenging. But not for the reason that we thought. I feared looking at how bad I had let things get. However, once I finally did look, I felt relief, not dread. Things were bad (like net worth of -\$550,000 bad), but finally facing my financial situation took the power away for my fears and back into my hands. The real challenge, however, was the time and effort it took to gather and separate all the helpful information from the unhelpful and potentially dangerous.

With time and determination, we succeeded in doing this. We created our own written financial plan, started managing all aspects of our own finances, and developed a debt pay off plan to be student debt free in 5 years. It was at this point that something happened which I did not totally expect...

I was still in training at this point. I did not make a cent more money. My net worth did not change at all. My debt remained the same ballooned amount. But I had a plan. And I knew that all I had to do was to follow this plan and I would, by definition, reach my financial goals and financial freedom—the idea that I could work and practice medicine because I want to, not because I have to. With this plan in place, my burnout began to alleviate. In fact, I noticed that I actually became a better doctor. And now that I am years out from this event, I can confirm that this relationship has only strengthened.

Suddenly, I realized that money does matter in medicine. In fact, it matters so much that it actually impacts our ability to care for patients. Every hospital system in the country is working to improve the well-being of physicians as we recognize burnout as an epidemic. But we are missing a huge part of the puzzle! Financial well-being is a critical component of overall well-being. And yet it is nearly universally ignored (for reasons, we will explore in this book)!

From this epiphany on, my mission and passion became helping all physicians improve their financial well-being to impact their overall well-being. The ultimate goal is for physicians to reach financial freedom. Not so they can retire. In fact, the most pushback I receive is from other doctors who think I am doing this because I want to retire. I love what I do! And I don't plan to retire anytime soon. But I do know that I work better when it is on my own terms. That also gives me flexibility to adapt if circumstances within healthcare change. I truly believe that a nation and world of financially free doctors could change and improve healthcare in ways that we cannot even currently imagine.

In fact, one of the best things about financial well-being is that there is never a "too early" or "too late." We all are on different schedules. I can promise you that whether you are early, mid, or late career in medicine, all the tools in this book are still as available to and effective for you as anyone else! Financial well-being, personal and professional satisfaction, and freedom of time are all in your grasp. And that is the aim...

The reason that I share this personal story first is because I know what you are going through. I've made every financial mistake in the book. I have yet to meet

anyone—yes, anyone—coming out of medical training in a worse financial situation than myself. What this means is that if I can do it, so can you! And I'm not shouting instructions back from the finish line. I am right here running the same race that you are!

And that is the purpose of this book. My goal is to create a simple, straightforward, and all-in-one-place guide for physicians to improve their financial well-being. That way, you don't need to search all over the place and try to decipher good from bad advice like I did. You have it all right here at your fingertips.

Before we move on together and get into the substance of this book, there is one last thing that I want to address. You may be feeling a bit nervous, intimidated, or downright scared to start reading. You may also be intimidated by the topic or worried that you do not have enough time to learn this. And I get it. Because I felt the same way before starting my journey. But we all progress the same way. We have to crawl before we walk before, we run. And in that order. Think back to day 1 of intern year. Did you feel ready? Heck no! But you took it step by step and look at where you are now. This is the same thing.

My recommendation is to set a goal of reading 5 or 10 pages of the book each day. That is what I did when I started, and the habit continues for me today. Stay consistent by creating manageable chunks and expectations for yourself. If you miss a day because of a long day in the clinic or hospital, that's fine. Just get back to it the next day. Before long, the pages will be turning!

Thank you for joining me on this journey. Now let's get started!

Buffalo, NY, USA

Jordan D. Frey, MD

Acknowledgments

Writing a book like this is certainly not anything that I could do alone. And while, despite my best efforts, I will leave someone out of these acknowledgments, there are certain individuals and groups that I would like to especially thank for their support and guidance in this endeavor!

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Next, my path to financial well-being is not walked alone. To all who read my blog at www.prudentplasticsurgeon.com, thank you. I am truly on this journey with you and draw immense inspiration and motivation in being able to share my story with you all. I continually learn from our entire community which has invigorated my passion for physician well-being and clinical medicine. You have also all served as unknowing readers and editors for much of the content of this book!

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