

# Professionals cautioned to balance work and personal life

As governor of Maryland, St. Francis of Assisi, Baltimore, parishioner Martin J. O'Malley works long hours in a high-pressure job that health experts say can lead to chronic health problems if he doesn't balance his professional life with other activities.

The 44-year-old governor appears to be the picture of health, but politicians are susceptible to health problems associated with stress.

"We have all seen the pictures of presidents when they first take office and when they leave," said Kandy Aboud, a psychiatric nurse practitioner and yoga teacher at Good Samaritan Hospital in northeast Baltimore. "They seem to have aged more so than what is normal. I believe a lot of that is due to stress."

Pressures to perform in demanding jobs call for the person to work long hours and those professionals often don't take time to exercise, eat healthy foods or get enough sleep, Ms. Aboud said.

"Chronic levels of stress not only cause depression and other psychological problems, but they also weaken the immune system and cause physical problems as well," she said. "People in high-stress jobs are at a higher risk for infections, depression, anxiety and weight gain. They also are at higher risk of having high blood pressure, which can lead to kidney disease, heart attack or stroke."

Though Gov. O'Malley only took office in January and is still adjusting to his new role, he says he learned a little about balancing his personal and professional life during his seven years as mayor of Baltimore and believes that with time he will be

able to do the same as governor.

“Being governor is a lot of hard work and long hours,” but he said pressure from the job is alleviated “with the love and support of my family and – when I can manage it – a few minutes of exercise.”

Taking time for activities not associated with work is a key ingredient for people with demanding careers, Ms. Aboud said.

“A lot of times we don’t have control over the stress in our lives, but we do have control over what we do about stress,” she said. “Exercise is one of the most important things we can do to help relieve stress. Humor is another. Laughing is one of the biggest stress busters.”

With long hours and frequent travel associated with her job as project director for the HRIS Lawson implementation for Bon Secours Health System, St. Matthew, Northwood, parishioner Sean G. Ballard finds that spending time with her family and pets helps her decompress.

“It is a constant re-focusing effort required on my part to make certain that I balance my activities,” the Baldwin resident said. “Working in a Catholic organization helps tremendously, as my spirituality is the primary focus on my life. It is the core of my being, and I am fortunate to be part of an organization where it is woven in the fabric of the organizational culture.”

It’s important for people to participate in activities, such as yoga, outside of work, Ms. Aboud says, and she discourages people from completely aligning their identity with their job title.

“Recognize that it’s an important job, but that you are more than this job,” she said. “It’s important to remember who you were before you had that job.”