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RAP

Resident Assistance Program Newsletter
December 2014
Vol. XI No. 4

Married to a Doctor - A Discussion of the Rewards and the Realities

Some of the challenges are the same, while others are unique to medical careers. When two doctors are married or in a long-term relationship, what makes those relationships successful?

Researchers at the University of Michigan Medical School conducted interviews with individuals in dual-physician and single-physician marriages. They reported their results in



“Getting married, for me, was the best thing I ever did. I was suddenly beset with an immense sense of release, that we have something more important than our separate selves, and that is the marriage. There's immense happiness that can come from working towards that.”

- Nick Cave

Academic Medicine (August 5, 2014).¹ The findings illustrate that physicians identify strategies to navigate the difficult aspects of their lives, and point out the need for the topic to become a part of medical education.

Monica L. Lypson, MD, MHPE conducted research along with Rachel L. Perlman, MD and Paula T. Ross, PhD.

Four themes emerged from the interviews with married physicians, the doctors report.

Role Clarity

One theme was recognizing the important role of each family member to ensure an efficient family unit.

“Role clarity is very important no matter the gender or societal expectations,” says Lypson. “You have to figure out what works best for the couple/ family involved and then **do** that. You should also be open to communication to prevent resentment or other unspoken issues when there is conflict.”

Mutual Support

Another theme the researchers identified was that couples rely on mutual

Whether you are married, contemplating marriage or questioning whether you should marry at all, there are issues that can cause stress and conflict during your residency. If you find yourself in need of some help sorting things out, remember that you have a caring and confidential resource available 24/7: your Resident Assistance Program. Equipped to guide you through a wide range of challenging, stressful and overwhelming personal and work related issues, RAP professionals will listen to your concerns.

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support in their relationships.

“Many participants emphasized both the support they provided to and received from their domestic partner,” the report states. Participants also recognized how the support they received from their domestic partners helped them achieve their career goals.

Shared Values

Shared values are another part of a successful medical marriage. The report quotes one participant, Dr. Xie, who explained: “We both value the importance of raising kids,

(Continued on page 2)

Communication about Finances Essential for Two-Career Couples

Healthy communication between two partners is essential to the success of a marriage, reports the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in its online report "Foundations for Strong Families 201."

Avoidance of certain topics, like finances or credit history, may indicate hidden issues and concerns about acceptance. Money can be a difficult topic, especially talking about different cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, the meaning of money and spending styles. Without addressing the topic of money, the relationship and finances may suffer. Conflict resolution, whether with a specific partner or a creditor or both, can be a key to improving financial and relationship situations.

The full report includes a useful tool for starting a discussion: "Couples Quiz: What's Your Financial Compatibility?" Find it at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/FinancialStability/201/index.shtml#Talking>

Your Resident Assistance Program

The RAP newsletter is provided as a benefit to medical residents at the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine and their dependents.

We welcome your comments on newsletter topics, however, we cannot provide RAP services by email.

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Married to a Doctor: Rewards and Realities

(Continued from page 1)

that's number one on the list. [Number] two is we both value each other's careers. We value each other's opinions, and, believe me, we do not agree on many things and we have had issues with that. But I respect her opinions and I think she respects mine. And we both bring, I think, different things to the marriage that we like and respect."

Benefits of Being a Physician

In an earlier, separate survey of female physician members of the Minnesota Medical Association², responses indicated that the advantages of being married to another physician far outweigh the disadvantages.

Lypson and her colleagues explored these advantages in their study. The theme that emerged was that two-doctor couples acknowledge the relationship benefits of being married to a physician. Beyond the ability to care for an ill or injured family member, participants said they valued the financial and occupational security associated with being a physician.

Takeaway Strategies

Finding ways to connect, even when they are small, matters in the long run, says Lypson. "You have work on your relationship the same way you work on your career. It takes communication and it takes time."

Ideally, says Lypson, the study's findings will lead to additional study of dual physician couples, which can be used as best practices and as a part of standard medical education curricula.

¹ "Understanding the Medical Marriage: Physicians and Their Partners Share Strategies for Success." Perlman R, Ross P, Lypson M. *Academic Medicine* http://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Abstract/publishahead/Understanding_the_Medical_Marriage_Physicians.98995.aspx

² "Exploring the dual-physician marriage." Smith C, Boulger J, Beattie K. *Minnesota Medicine* <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11915527>

Resources

- "The Medical Marriage: A Couple's Survival Guide" by Wayne M. Sotile, Ph.D. and Mary O. Sotile, M.A. Birch Lane Press, (February 1996)
- "Rewards and Challenges of Two-Physician Marriages" by Gretchen Henkel <http://www.the-hospitalist.org/article/rewards-and-challenges-of-two-physician-marriages/>
- "Surgeon-physician marriages can place stress on careers, emotional health" Weber Shandwick Worldwide, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/11/101130104608.htm>
- "How Do Duals Do It?" Mothers in Medicine group blog <http://www.mothersinmedicine.com/2010/03/how-do-duals-do-it.html>
- "Dual-doctor couples learn to make time for each other" by Janet Colwell, July-August ACP *Observer* <http://www.acpinternist.org/archives/2004/07/dualdocs.htm>