

Healthy Connections

This is the first installment in our new feature Healthy Connections which is dedicated to wellness for physicians and medical families. We'll provide you with stories and information about how to stay healthy — both physically and emotionally — statistics, the latest resources available, advice on work/life balance and updates on what the AMA is doing in this area. This issue, we're presenting excerpts from "21st Century Medical Families: Engaged, Enlightened and Empowered," the popular presentation by Alliance President Sandi Frost.

During the presentation Frost commented on the nature of physicians married to non-physicians. She remarked, "Medical Marriages are increasingly squeezed for time with both partners in the work force."

Putting even more strain on a marriage is the situation of physicians married to other physicians, and the unique challenges these marriages may encounter. Frost explained, "Both women and men in dual-doctor families differ in their professional and family lives from other married physicians."

One issue in many medical marriages is that long hours are viewed as "normal" and can result from the doctor's personality and the culture of medicine.

Frost pointed out that main sources of conflict tend to stem from time

and money. When dealing with time conflicts, she recommended the spouse not take lateness personally. To resolve financial conflict, it is best to set clear financial goals together.

The types of stress medical families may encounter are broken out into the following three categories by Wayne and Mary Sotile, the authors of *The Medical Marriage*:

- 1) The Anticipated and Unavoidable, which account for 80 percent of the stresses medical families face each day: postponing gratification until after training, long hours of work, emotional toll from fear of making mistakes and daily exposure to pain and suffering.
- 2) The Unanticipated and Unavoidable of which many pertain only to 21st century medical families: six-figure medical school debt, government intrusion into practice, physician bashing in the media.
- 3) The Anticipated and Avoidable, but not avoided are the toxic stresses that fuel resentments and can potentially do the most harm to medical marriages: competitiveness, needing to control others, constantly rushing.

Strategies to maintain relationships include: assessment, walking in the other person's shoes; acceptance, this is our life, not a problem; anger management, resentments are the number one killer of relationships; and action, work together as a *team*.





Changing medical family demographics:

- Approximately 20 percent of male physicians are married to another physician
- Approximately half of female physicians are married to another physician
 - Decreasing percentage over the past 20 years
- Dual physician families will increase as number of women physicians increase

Work/Life balance checklist:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat right
- Surround yourself with people you like and respect
- Live in an area that suits your lifestyle
- Stay organized
- Confront your problems

Why the Alliance to build your action team:

- Unique in volunteer opportunities to partner with our physician spouses to build better communities and have an impact on the future of medical care in our nation
- Membership gives spouses access to a network of friendship and support in the medical community
- Spouses grow skills in leadership, communication and advocacy

Advantages of teamwork for Alliances and medical associations:

- Joint projects strengthen both organizations' programs and goals
- For the medical society — the Alliance is its volunteer arm
- To the Alliance, the medical society is a resource, both for funding and medical expertise