

3 tips for a successful medical marriage

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Research shows that physicians commonly enter medical marriages, but ensuring your marriage is a success requires much more than shared professional interests. Similarly, marriages between physicians and non-physicians have common challenges that come with medical careers. Learn these key tips for physicians in medical marriages to strengthen your connection with your partner as your career and relationship progress.



In a recent issue of the AMA Alliance publication *Physician Family*, physician resilience experts offered some of the key lessons that can strengthen medical marriages, particularly for female physicians.

Here's what they recommend to physicians and their partners:

Prepare for tough decisions about having children

Starting a family is a wonderful life-changing event, but one that requires meticulous planning,

especially for female physicians who face the “bittersweet combination” of finding time to care for patients and their own children. In fact, “within 10 years of completing medical training, approximately 80 percent of female physicians are married, and 85 percent of those become mothers,” according to the article. If you see children in your future, know that female physicians often report having to make more “intense soul-splitting” decisions than their average female colleagues who don’t have children or male colleagues, according to the article’s authors, Wayne M. Sotile, PhD, Mary O. Sotile, Julia E. Sotile Orlando, and Rebecca Sotile Fallon. The Sotiles run the Center for Physician Resilience in Davidson, N.C., and have counseled more than 10,000 physicians on resilience techniques. As you plan for children, think carefully about how your family will align your long-term career or the time you may have to take off. For instance, “in a national survey of 1,248 physicians, women reported interrupting their careers for 8.5 months for child rearing; men reported interrupting their careers for less than one month,” according to the article.

Communicate openly about career goals and how they'll impact your spouse

Research has shown that feeling that your spouse supports your career is imperative to happiness in any marriage. However, this need for open communication about career plans is even more crucial in medical marriages for which juggling the demands of medicine and family life can put a unique strain on the partners of physicians. “Just as has been the case for female spouses of male physicians traditionally, male spouses of contemporary female physicians often report feeling overwhelmed by the combined home and/or work responsibilities that fill their lives,” the Sotiles wrote. “This in and of itself is not a risk factor [for a marriage]. Harboring resentment and avoiding communication about this is.” To avoid building resentment, the Sotiles emphasize the importance of communication and speaking honestly about major life decisions.

Learn to compromise (hint: joint decisions are key)

This one may be tough to accept, but it’s important to understand: “As family life progresses, even the most supportive partner’s tolerance for the demands of medicine is likely to wane,” the Sotiles wrote. “This is most clearly seen when a woman physician is married to a non-physician.” However, they noted that this “can be avoided” when a physician takes time to hear their partner’s perspective. “Research has shown time and again that keys to success and resilience in medical families are communication, compromise and joint decision-making,” the Sotiles wrote. “Without these three factors, spouses of physicians run the risk of being made to feel less than or second to a career in medicine.”

Check out the full issue of *Physician Family* for additional insights.