Managing a family with two working physicians requires artful balance and strategy—two skills Tracy Roth, MD, has learned as a private practice owner, mother of six children and wife of a fellow physician. Learn how to tap into the strengths of your medical marriage with these six tips Dr. Roth recommends for two-physician families.

In the beginning—at least during residency—raising two children and working long hours seemed easy for Dr. Roth and her husband. After all, they had a consistent source of income, fewer expenses and had managed to still find time for their social lives.

As residents, “we both worked long hours and often had call on alternate nights,” Dr. Roth recently wrote in AMA Alliance publication Physician Family. “This really wasn’t so bad because it gave us time to ourselves and with friends while the other was at work. On our combined days/nights off, we had nothing to worry about but each other, so it was a romantic fun catchup.”

But then private practice began and life took a turn. “Throw in a new community, a mortgage and a
baby. Lots of changes had to occur," Dr. Roth said.

So how did they manage them? Here are six strategies that helped Dr. Roth and her husband weather daily pressures as busy physicians and parents:

**Accept help—it’ll save you time and energy.** When workloads increased for Dr. Roth and her husband, they hired a nanny. “We were … fortunate to find a nanny we affectionately called ‘Mary Poppins.’ She helped keep us all in line,” Dr. Roth wrote. With a nanny on board, she and her husband were able to better divide their time evenly between caring for their children and patients.

**Create a schedule for yourselves and the kids.** “A large dry erase board with everyone’s activities is a must,” Dr. Roth wrote. "We have structured routines in the morning, whether the sitter or I are at the house. This helps the kids stay on track. Our afternoons are less predictable because of extracurricular activities, but the children have learned to do homework on the run and keep their stuff together. We are working hard on preparing for the next day at night.”

**Stay organized.** “‘A place for everything, and everything in its place’ is the motto we are trying to live by,” Dr. Roth wrote. “I am working hard to instill this in my kids because so much time is wasted and anxiety expended when looking for lost items. Everyone is more relaxed when they can find what they need.”

**Evaluate leadership roles in your household (note: this may require embracing changes in your careers).** For instance, “My husband and I now realize that our family functions better when one person takes on the responsibility of being the ‘primary’ parent/house CEO,” Dr. Roth wrote. “Both of us cannot be on the fast track at work and expect the house and family to stay healthy. I am fortunate to have found a part-time position in academics that will give me professional fulfillment but still allow me to be the primary person in charge at home.” By being more honest about their family preference, Dr. Roth still enjoys a valuable career without being saddled with pressure to choose it over her family. “I decided that work is good for me. I feel smart, needed and valued (things that you don’t get at home on a daily basis as your kids say ‘you are so mean,’ and they whine, beg and create one mess after another), but I also want to be present for my children and husband," Dr. Roth wrote.

**Make time for each other, especially as your careers change.** This was a lesson Dr. Roth learned as she and her husband’s practices were growing. “We were very 50-50 during that time,” she wrote. “We were intent on establishing our careers while being ever present for our two young children. We each took time off when someone was sick or had a school program. When our nanny had surgery, we each took vacation time to be the primary parent at home. We also made sure to never be on call the same nights. This was all great for the kids, but it led to a lot of exhaustion and little time for each other.” Now, she and her
husband “have made it a priority to schedule at least one night a week to be alone, without kids or friends. This can be difficult because our schedules are so busy, but the health of our relationship and the health of our family is dependent on this,” Dr. Roth wrote.

**Make time for yourself.** No matter how busy your schedule, be sure to block off time for personal hobbies and self-care, Dr. Roth recommends. “Reading, running and tennis are things I enjoy,” she wrote. “I try to allot some time for these activities because I need an outlet. Sometimes my kids or husband are involved, and other times it is strictly me time.” Accepting that next invitation to a party or social event may also be a good idea: “I … make time for a weekend away with friends once a year. It is amazing how invigorating that time is,” Dr. Roth wrote.

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

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