4 tips for dating a medical student

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As a medical student, you may face particular relationship challenges if your significant other doesn’t have firsthand experience with juggling the unique demands of medical school.

If this sounds familiar, reference these key insights for a successful relationship from the partner of a recent med school graduate.

Kevin Dwyer is happily engaged to a second-year resident he began dating when she was in medical school, but he admits that their progress as a couple did not come without its lessons and challenges. Based on their experiences, he recently shared advice on maintaining a healthy relationship with a physician in training in the AMA Alliance magazine Physician Family. Among his insights are four tips:

Set realistic expectations about your time and finances. Dwyer admits he had to shed his romantic ideals about being in a long-term relationship with a medical student. “I came to realize that being a … medical student meant that, aside from the three to four hours we had together each week, virtually all of her time was spent at the hospital or studying,” Dwyer wrote. “Not to mention, residents make around $13 per hour and carry” a lot of medical education debt.

Strategize your time together, especially during clinical years of training. “To say third year was tough is an understatement,” Dwyer wrote. “Obviously it was challenging for her with the studying and whatnot, but it also put a strain on our budding romance. This is when I first learned about ‘free-time envy.’” “The only time we would get to see each other was on the weekends,” he wrote. “I started taking her out on Friday and seeing how long I could stay into Saturday. Normally I would make her breakfast, help tidy up the place and generally keep her company.”

Keep an open mind and be adaptable. Be prepared to navigate important life changes with your medical student as they transition from medical school to residency. “I quickly learned that traditional
gender roles cannot exist,” Dwyer wrote. “It took almost 18 months of residency to become comfortable in my new role as gourmet chef, designated shopper, occasional handyman, life coach, comforter, personal assistant and full-time listener. It took her almost as long to fully understand that my greatest satisfaction comes from her success, even if it means the hospital gets more time with her than I do.”

**Communicate openly and effectively.** After Dwyer’s girlfriend began residency, she’d often arrive home stressed or exhausted, which Dwyer said really strained their relationship because he repressed many frustrations about their lack of time together.

“We had a couple of major blowups, in large part due to my inability to understand and express how everything was affecting me,” he wrote. “Fortunately, once we started communicating more, things got better again.”

See more tips for dating a medical student in *Physician Family*. Also, learn more advice about how to effectively communicate with a medical student in a relationship.