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When a Physician is Married to a Physician

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WHAT IS IT LIKE BEING a physician married to a physician? Thank goodness we're in two different fields of medicine! You see, my wife is a pediatrician and I see adult patients. It makes a world of difference to us.

Knowing How To Be Supportive

When my physician-wife comes home, exhausted after a day with 30 patients and often twice the number of parents, I listen to her intently. I have nothing to add. I have no suggestions for treatment. After all, these are kids! I don't do kids and I have no idea what I would do with one if it threw-up all over me. I admire her tact, her expertise and especially her patience with the parents. It's exhausting work. I know all that and I respect the job she does and the job she has done for almost 20 years now. And finally, I'm grateful I don't have her job.

When it's my turn to talk about a case over dinner, I mention the pertinent details, the possible differentials and the most interesting findings. There are always interesting findings in rheumatology (my opinion of course). To her credit, my physician-wife says little. She listens. She asks which way I'm leaning regarding the diagnosis and/or treatments and I know she appreciates the complexity of what I deal with in my field. Mercifully, she rarely has suggestions and never recriminations regarding what I didn't do or should do. She allows me to review the case out loud to her but I know, she's really just letting me review the case out loud for me.

There is another side to this coin when our medical backgrounds collide. Like the time my wife diagnosed my asthmatic attack as an anxiety disorder. Or, in all fairness, the time I thought her facial rash might have been a manifestation of lupus. It wasn't. There's little doubt that our lives are greatly impacted by our professions and we both delve into the great mystery that is medicine on a daily basis at work and home. Sometimes, too much medical knowledge of what can happen is a dangerous thing. We've learned to allow for that. Perhaps what saves us from being totally immersed in our work to the exclusion of all else is a sense of humor.

The Kids Are Listening

There are some effects of our dual physician relationship on the whole family. So let me tell you about our boys. There was a time I thought our oldest was a hypochondriac. By the time he was nine, he had a fairly impressive knowledge of pediatric diseases and medications. Like a medical student going through

rotations, he often complained of symptoms he overheard during his parent's conversations at home. When he started asking about treatment for his symptoms we decided to make an effort to avoid these family discussions. Our youngest, who could barely pronounce many of these diseases, parroted the concerns of his older brother as best he could. It took awhile to convince him that phimoses had nothing to do with the Red Sea parting and lupus patients were not related to werewolves.

So, what's it like being married to a physician over 26 years? Ultimately, I suspect it's the same as every other married couple. There are good times and the not so good times. We work hard and we sometimes miss out on occasions as a family because one of us is called away or the other is scheduled to work. The boys have learned to adapt. I don't think either of us ever regretted our career choices because of these times. We are physicians and we love our work. We are also parents and we love our kids. I'm not sure how our family differs from other 21st century families since this is the only family I know. When all is said and done, I'm content with that.