

Saving the medical marriage

I am the wife of a rural physician. During the night, I often hear the buzz of my husband's pager, and I sink deeper under the warm covers as he stumbles out of bed. In the grey light of dawn, I often sense the empty space beside me in the bed after he's gotten up to deal with the piles of paperwork that call out to be completed before the clinic day begins. I have had Valentine's Day dinner with my sons instead of my husband because the last patient of the day came in with crushing chest pain — and how can matters of the emotional heart trump matters of the physical one? I watch my husband spend every day torn in multiple, equally worthy directions, with virtually no time for himself.

On reading Dr. Ursus's candid piece on marital counselling,¹ I felt great empathy for the author and his wife. I'm generalizing, but I believe that the qualities of compassion and dedication that make a loveable spouse can also cause strife in the marriage of a rural physician. The sense of loyalty and commitment that sent them down their career path in the first place now leaves them torn between 2 groups of people who really do need them — their patients and their families. The challenge of finding balance between work and family is especially raw for rural physicians, and I hope that some of Dr. Ursus's colleagues can help him gain insight into achieving that balance.

Susan E. Freitag
Ontario

REFERENCE

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It was touching to read Dr. Ursus's account of the troubles in his marriage.¹ Touching because I know of too many colleagues who have actually lived through or fear a similar scenario. Our all-consuming passion to help patients often places a huge strain on our personal relationships with spouses and children.

Fortunately, there are some excellent books to help physicians preempt difficulties in their personal lives before they reach the stage where counselling becomes necessary. *The Medical Marriage: Sustaining Healthy Relationships for Physicians and Their Families*, by husband-and-wife team Wayne M. Sotile and Mary O. Sotile, describes key factors in sustaining successful medical marriages. The book includes simple self-assessment tools for identify-

ing important stressors and personality traits that can harm a marriage. *Iron-doc: Practical Stress Management Tools for Physicians* is a new book by Canadian expert healer of doctors, psychiatrist Mamta Gautam. It shows that when physicians try to be all things to all people, their personal needs are often neglected. Dr. Gautam describes, in practical, easy-to-read prose, how to stay in medicine and enjoy it and ensure that one's family enjoys it too.