

Surgeon-physician marriages can place stress on careers, emotional health

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Surgeons married to physicians face more challenges in balancing their personal and professional lives than do surgeons whose partners work in a non-physician field or stay at home, according to new research findings focused on surgeon marriages published in the November issue of the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*.

As part of the significant influx of women into the workforce over the last 50 years, more women are now surgeons and physicians than ever before. This trend has produced many more dual-career marriages, including many more dual-physician marriages. This new study focuses specifically on how surgeons fare in being partnered with other surgeons, with other (non-surgical) physicians, with non-physicians or with spouses who stay at home. The researchers used data from a large 2008 national survey of members of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), and set out to find how surgeons in dual-physician relationships differ from other surgeons whose partners are not physicians in their demographics, practice characteristics, family lives, distress (ie, burnout, depression, and quality of life), and [job satisfaction](#).

They found that surgeons in dual physician relationships had a greater incidence of career conflicts and work-home conflicts (all p < 0.05). "To help facilitate the lives of dual-career couples, health care organizations should consider coordinated schedules, daycare [provisions] in the workplace, adjusted timelines for promotion and tenure, and planning for spousal employment during recruitment," said Liselotte N. Dyrbye, MD, MHPE, FACP, Associate Professor of Medicine and a Consultant

of the Division of Primary Care Internal Medicine at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine in Rochester, MN, and the lead author of the study.

The survey was completed by 7,905 of 24,922 ACS members (a 32 percent response rate), of whom 7,120 (90 percent) were married or in domestic partnerships. Nearly half (3,471 of 7,120 or 48.8 percent) of surgeons' partners did not work outside the home. Among the remaining 3,649 surgeons whose partner worked outside the home, 31.9 percent (1,165) indicated their partner was a fellow physician; nearly a third of the physician couples (335 of 1,165) were surgeon-surgeon couples.

Surgeons married to or partnered with other physicians, who represent a growing segment of the surgeon population, are younger and newer to practice than their surgical colleagues who are married to or partnered with non-physicians or partners who did not work outside the home.

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