
OTHER SIDE MED

MARRIAGE IN MEDICINE

A guided workbook for couples building a marriage around medicine.

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Marriage in Medicine

Being in medicine isn't just a career; it's an entire lifestyle. And if you're married to someone in medicine, you didn't just say "I do" at the altar. You signed up for a lifetime subscription to delayed dinners, interrupted weekends, and likely a deep, undying love for coffee! If that feels familiar, then this workbook is for you - the physician and the spouse - to strengthen your relationship, build resilience as a couple, and remind each other why you said yes to this wild ride together in the first place.

Our hope for you: Genuine Connection

Throughout this workbook, we hope you and your spouse experience moments of deep connection. We hope that you'll be honest about the past, dream about the future, and share what you need from each other to pursue a sweeter, more purpose-filled marriage.

We hope that you take it slow. The point of this workbook isn't to sit down and read it all in a day. Instead, take it section by section, spending time reflecting, discussing, and applying its lessons one day, week, or month at a time.

Lastly, we hope you laugh with one another. Medicine has a way of crippling our humor due to the seriousness of our work. So, we hope you'll find space throughout the questions for deep belly laughs. Laughs that bring levity to the situation. Laughs that offer genuine intimacy. Laughs that remind you that you will always be stronger together than you are apart.

Important disclaimer: We're not marriage counselors or therapists. We don't have a perfect marriage, nor do we claim to be perfect parents. We're simply two individuals with differing backgrounds, life experiences, careers and interests, who believe that marriage in medicine is worth fighting for. These questions simply come from our own learnings, struggles, desires, and dreams. They're not necessarily research-backed, therapist-approved, or rooted in faith. They're just questions that have helped us strengthen our love for one another during some really difficult times in medicine.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Each section contains five to ten conversation-starting questions, a space for reflection, and an action step. Make this fun - grab a drink or a tub of ice cream, block out some time together, and get real.

01

A Year in Review

A few months ago, my wife and I put our son to bed and sat down on the couch, exhausted but determined. It had been one of those “harder” seasons of life - long shifts, missed date nights, and the constant balancing of our careers and marriage. Somewhere in the chaos, we realized we had spent so much time surviving the day-to-day that we hadn’t stopped to reflect on what we had been through together.

So, we made a decision. We poured two cups of coffee (her fourth of the day, my second), put our phones on silent, and started talking. Not just about the hard stuff, though there was plenty of that, but about the moments over the last year that made us laugh, the small victories we had barely acknowledged, and the unexpected ways we had grown as a couple.

That conversation changed everything. It reminded us why we do this: not just in medicine but in marriage.

It helped us see that even in the messiness, there was beauty.

Even in the struggle, there was progress.

And even in the exhaustion, there was love.

For us, reflection isn’t about dwelling on what went wrong. Quite the opposite, in fact. Reflection is about recognizing where we’ve been in order to step forward with greater clarity, gratitude, and purpose. It’s a way to be proud of what we’ve built and how far we’ve come. And we believe that the same is possible for you.

That’s why this first section matters. Before you dream about the future, take some time to reflect on the past. Let’s look to the last 12 months. You may be surprised by what you learn about one another.

Question 1: What is your favorite memory we created together in the last 12 months? Why is it your favorite? Is it something replicable that would bring you joy to relive or experience again?

REFLECTION *"Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory." - Dr. Seuss*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 2: What has been the most rewarding part of your work/career in the last 12 months? Why has that been rewarding to you? Do you feel like I was present in those moments to support and celebrate you - or do you feel like I was distant or even absent from knowing these things mattered?

REFLECTION *"Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." - Theodore Roosevelt*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 3: Was there a time in the last 12 months when you felt loved by me the most? When & how? What can I do more of regularly that would help you feel more deeply loved?

REFLECTION *"Love is not about how many days, months, or years you have been together. It's about how much you love each other every single day."*
- Unknown

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 4: What do you think was the hardest part of our marriage in the last 12 months? Why was it the hardest? What growth came about as a result?

REFLECTION *"Difficulties in life are intended to make us better, not bitter." - Dan Reeves*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 5: What is something surprising you learned about yourself in the last 12 months? How do you think that I could help foster this moving forward?

REFLECTION *“Personal development is the belief that you are worth the effort, time and energy needed to develop yourself.” - Denis Waitley*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

02

Getting to the Heart

I remember a night early in Hannah's residency when I could tell something was off. She wasn't her usual self. But when I asked her what was wrong, she just shook her head and said, "Nothing, I'm fine."

I wanted to believe her, but I knew better.

The truth is, when you love someone, you start to notice the small things; the slight shift in their tone, the way they hesitate before answering, the weight they carry even when they don't say a word. And yet, even in marriage, even when we know something is off, it's easy to let the moment pass. It's easier to assume our spouse will tell us what they need, rather than leaning in and really seeing them.

That night, instead of letting it go, I told Hannah, "I know you're not fine. And you don't have to be. I'm here."

She exhaled, the deep kind of breath that comes when you finally let go of the weight you've been carrying alone. She told me about a tough case, about the exhaustion that went beyond just needing sleep, how she felt like she wasn't "enough" at work or at home, and the mom-guilt she was experiencing for not being as present as she wanted to be. I don't always get this right, but in that moment, I realized she didn't want or need me to problem-solve any of the above. She just needed me to be fully present and listen, understand where she was coming from, and help her feel like she wasn't alone.

Ultimately, she wanted me to care about her heart.

This section is about all that. About getting to the heart of each other, and showing how deeply we each care about it. About slowing down long enough to ask the real questions. These conversations aren't always easy (especially in medicine) but they are always worth it.

Question 1: When do you feel safest with me? (Mentally, Emotionally, Physically, Spiritually)

REFLECTION *"True love begins when nothing is looked for in return." - Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 2: What is something about our marriage you wished we talked about more?

REFLECTION *"Honest discussions are the soil where a strong marriage grows." - Unknown*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 3: What is ONE thing I do that makes you feel truly known and understood?

REFLECTION *"The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return." - Nat King Cole*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 4: Is there any hurt I have caused you that I'm not aware of? Something you have held onto that we should talk about?

REFLECTION *"A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers." , Ruth Bell Graham*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 5: Name ONE thing about me that makes you the most proud and that you wish everyone close to us knew.

REFLECTION *"The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated." - William James*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 6: How can I better show up for you emotionally when life feels heavy?

REFLECTION *"Sometimes, we just need someone to simply be there, not to fix anything, but to let us feel supported and loved." - Unknown*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 7: What do you think our relationship teaches others about love? Because of our love, do you think our marriage is something others respect? Why?

REFLECTION *"A successful marriage is not the union of two perfect people. It is that of two imperfect people who have learned the value of forgiveness and grace." - Darlene Schacht*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 8: Where have you seen God at work in our marriage? (Are there moments where you felt guided, strengthened, or deeply connected in ways beyond yourself?)

REFLECTION

"Marriage is not about finding the right person, but about being the right person with the help of God's love." - Unknown

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 9: What is a promise I made to you that holds the deepest meaning? How can I recommit to it today?

REFLECTION *“People with good intentions make promises. People with good character keep them.” - Unknown*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 10: If we fast-forward to the end of our lives, what kind of legacy do you want to leave as a couple? Are we living in alignment with that legacy today? How so?

REFLECTION *“The true legacy of marriage is not found in the ceremony, the status, or societal recognition, but in the quiet, consistent work of two people creating a life that uplifts and restores.” - Therapy for Black Men*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

03

Let's Laugh | Medical Edition

Transparently, this has been one of the more difficult parts of our marriage. As I (Hannah) progressed in my medical education and training, there was always an emphasis on professional behavior and presentation inside and outside the hospital. This is vital in medical settings, given the seriousness of patient care and the professionalism required for interpersonal relationships and collaborative care models. But, this can be toxic in a relationship setting as it can often make your partner feel more like a colleague than your spouse. It took a very blunt conversation where Chris finally asked, "Can I just get Hannah?" for me to realize that.

This prompted some serious personal reflection as I realized I was not allowing myself to be present in the mundane moments of our relationship and marriage. I had to consciously allow myself the freedom to let go, relax, and just be silly with my husband. And to my surprise this allowed for so much more joy and recharge than I had ever expected. I hope that you can take these questions and allow yourself to have fun with them. You know what they say - laughter truly is the best medicine.

Question 1: If I were a patient on rounds, what would my chart say?

REFLECTION *"A doctor's note might get you out of work, but it won't get you out of dishes." - Every Medical Spouse Ever*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 2: Reflection: "Marriage is like a good treatment plan - communication is the diagnosis, love is the prescription, and patience is the follow-up care." - Unknown Action Step: Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 3: If I were the doctor and you were the patient, and you came into my office in need of a physical, what would that look like?

REFLECTION *"A physical exam in marriage is just code for 'please rub my back.'" - Every Married Person Ever*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 4: If our life together was a hospital floor, what kind of unit would we be and why? Ie. ICU - intense, chaotic, but well-managed; L&D - where something unexpected is always happening.

REFLECTION *"Honestly, we're probably the Break Room - where all the best conversations happen, caffeine is essential, and we regroup before heading back into the madness." - Chris Herring*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 5: Name a place you've always wanted to be intimate but were previously too scared to try.

REFLECTION *"There's a fine line between 'spontaneous' and 'we might get arrested for this.'" - Every Fun Couple Ever*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

04

Where is our Marriage Headed?

We got married three weeks before Match Day. We moved to a new city together two months later. It felt like a never ending season of transitions: Wedding. Honeymoon. Match. Buying a home. Moving. DIY'ing a fixer-upper. Starting residency. Getting plugged into our local community. Sounds like a great way to kickstart your marriage, right? Truthfully, the first year of marriage was really difficult. Between learning how to love one another, how to be married, and how to adjust to a wild work schedule, we struggled! Thankfully, we didn't throw in the towel or give up on one another - because what started as hard has turned into a beautiful, thriving marriage. But it didn't happen by accident. We know it is easy to get caught up in the "now" - handling what's urgent and responding to what's right in front of us. But a strong marriage doesn't just happen in the present; it's built with the future in mind. We firmly believe that the choices we make today shape the marriage we'll have tomorrow.

This last section is about stepping back and asking questions about the direction of your marriage.

The strongest couples don't just drift into great marriages; they build one with purpose. So take this time to dream, plan, and commit to something bigger.

Question 1: What is ONE area of our marriage you believe needs intentional focus this year?

REFLECTION *"Refocusing on what you do want will take you in the direction of what you want." - Joe Vitale*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 2: What is a dream, goal, or adventure you want us to pursue together this year?

REFLECTION *"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined." - Henry David Thoreau*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 3: How do you see our marriage serving something much bigger than just “us” this year? What impact do you want to have on our family, community, or the world? How can we live that out in a way that strengthens our relationship?

REFLECTION *"Our love should not just be words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action." - 1 John 3:18*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 4: What things need to change for us to better protect “our time” as a couple amid the chaos of life and work? What boundaries do you think we need to set? What routines need to be put in place?

REFLECTION *“Love yourself enough to set boundaries. Your time and energy are precious. You get to choose how to use it. You teach people how to treat you by deciding what you will and won't accept.” - Anna Taylor (Author of “Relief”)*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

Question 5: What does a strong, thriving version of “us” look like a year from now?

REFLECTION *"Great marriages don't happen by luck or by accident. They are the result of a consistent investment of time, thoughtfulness, and hard work." - Dave Willis*

ACTION STEP

Based on the discussion in the questions above, is there anything you need to take action on?

FINAL NOTE

It Doesn't Stop Here

This workbook was not meant to be an all-encompassing list of the topics that matter in a marriage. Hopefully, it was an easy guide that curated meaningful conversations, intentional time together, and a renewed focus on what truly matters.

Marriage in medicine isn't easy or for the faint of heart. It's a journey filled with long nights, unpredictable schedules, and moments when the weight of responsibility feels like too much to carry. But through it all, you have something that no shift, pager, or outside demand can take away - your commitment to one another.

So, if there is one thing you take from this workbook, we hope it's this: your marriage is worth fighting for. The deep connection you crave is built in quiet moments, in sacrificial love, in small, consistent gestures of kindness, and in showing up for each other when it's hard. The conversations you've had here aren't just words on a page; they are seeds planted for a strong, more resilient, and more joyful marriage.

As you move forward, keep asking the hard questions. Keep choosing each other even on the days when it feels inconvenient. Keep laughing, keep dreaming, and keep finding ways to grow together.

Because at the end of the day, medicine may be your career, but your marriage is the legacy.

With hope, love, and encouragement,
Chris Herring and Hannah Thompson, DO, MS

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