

## **So you are a doctor or partner of a doctor?**

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## **Do you are a doctor or partner of a doctor ?**

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**By Dr Brighton Chireka**

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Growing up in the 70s and 80s we were only encouraged to be either a doctor , nurse or a teacher . Interestingly my older siblings went into the medical and teaching profession and myself I was no exception. Society still has some misguided facts about doctors and at times the conversations that doctors or their partners have with the public can be challenging to say the least . I will highlight some of the conversations and hopefully help in making the public pause before they start these conversations.

### **Marital conversations**

The general public do not comment much about marital issues of most professionals but find it alright to do so when it comes to doctors. Some on knowing that you are a married male doctor , they rush into conclusion and ask you , "so which hospital does your wife work in ?" The problem here is that someone has already made an assumption that the doctor is married to a nurse. Yes it is true that doctors do get married to nurses but to now assume that it's the same for every doctor is not fair and can be disrespectful.

Still on the marital issue , some of the comments are really painful but the people who say them do not see any harm in what they are saying. Partners of doctors have been asked questions like, " You know doctor's marriages do not last ? Or All doctors cheat on their wives" . We know that doctors are not saints they do messy up like any other person but when you look at the divorce rate among doctors , it is actually half of the national average. One then wonders why people come up with these wrongs figures and spread them as the gospel truth. I hope that people will reflect first before they say these judgemental comments . Why is it alright to say these to doctors but not alright to say the same to other professionals?

### **Male partners of female doctors**

Our community is still struggling to accept that women can earn more that their male partners. Male partners of female doctors are teased for having a woman earn more than they do. The fun thing is that the people who make these comments do not even do their homework well. In some cases the male partner though not being a doctor may be earning more that their partner who is a doctor. Some comments are really hurting such as , "So you got yourself a mum blesser or sugar mum" . Even if the female partner is to earn more than the male partner , that should not be met with comments about how uncomfortable their male partner should be.

I like what Sarah Epstein a master's candidate in couples and family therapy who blogs at Dating a Med Student said in her article which made me write this one;

"The men who date and marry female physicians are generally supportive and secure, not emasculated by their wife's earning potential." I agreed with Sarah and I encourage our society to support and not tease these men.

## **Females are nurses and black people cannot be doctors**

We have had several cases of female doctors that are called nurses during ward rounds in hospital by patients. Recently a black female doctor was not allowed to help a dying patient in a flight because she was not a doctor in the eyes of the air hostess. These comments perpetuate the frustrating stereotype that women are nurses and men are doctors. The recent stories emerging about men and women both failing to believe female physicians are actually physicians are important. The casual assumptions that women in medicine are always nurses or the insistence that a man cannot possibly feel ok that his partner might just out-earn him contribute to the problem. Society makes it worse by reinforcing such stereotype.

## **Financial comments**

As a community we hardly talk openly about our salaries but when it comes to doctors it's a different story all together. The day I became a medical student things changed because "everyone" started to see me as a rich person even though I was struggling to buy "sadza" at the student union cafe which used to cost \$1.60 . Each time I visited a local drinking place I was expected to be a "St Buyer " buying drinks for my friends and everyone present. By the way I used to drink alcohol heavily but stopped in 2004. You can read about my personal story here .

<http://docbeecee.co.uk/a-personal-story-about-drinking-alcohol/>

Partners of medical doctors are congratulated for being married to doctors. They are viewed as having won a lottery ticket and get told how lucky they are as they will not have to worry about money. They are asked to dream about the luxurious houses or cars they will have. The people who say these things do not mean any harm . They genuinely believe that doctors are loaded with cash.

The problem is that let's face it , it is not nice to discuss anyone's salary . It also implies that partners of doctors have chosen their partners based on their earning potentials or actual earnings . This is also frustrating to the doctors who are struggling to make ends meet due to the low wages being paid to them and also huge bill of medical school debt incurred during training. My message is the next time you mention doctor's wealth to them or their partner , remember that you may be talking to a couple that is struggling financially. Your comments may be insulting and distressing to

them.

## Comments on health of a doctor or their partner

Doctors and their partners are human beings who fall ill and need to be treated. They can be attacked by diseases such as cancer and also can have infertility problems. It's sad when we make comments that tend to suggest that being a doctor or a partner of a doctor is a vaccination against any disease. Comments such as ; " so your health is sorted now that you are married to a doctor or now you can have as many kids as you like " . These comments may cause pain if the couple is dealing with infertility problems or if one of them has cancer.

## Conclusion

There is always debate , comparisons and sadly competition and even racism when one looks into some of the comments made about doctors and their partners . As a doctor I have and continue to endure these comments and I hope they will lessen after this article. My appeal to everyone reading this article is we can do better for doctors and their partners . The life they lead is unusual and often extremely difficult. It is time to start pointing out these comments when we hear them and find ways to discuss medicine in supportive ways.

Credit goes to Sarah Epstein who is a master's candidate in couples and family therapy who blogs at Dating a Med Student.

This article was compiled by Dr Brighton Chireka , who is a GP and a blogger based in Kent in the United Kingdom. Feel free to contact him at [info@docbeecee.co.uk](mailto:info@docbeecee.co.uk) and you can read more of his work on his blog at [DR CHIREKA'S BLOG](#)

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