



Balancing Act

For these married Mary Greeley Medical Center physicians, flexibility is the secret to juggling work and family life.

Walk into the living room of [Lisa Banitt, M.D.](#), and [Bill Barry, M.D.](#), and your eyes are immediately drawn to the beautiful harp in the corner.

It belongs to their 10-year-old daughter Chloe. She and her 7-year-old twin sisters, Ellie and Sophie, all have musical interests, as indicated by the piano and viola case that share space with the harp. The girls also take ballet and Irish dance lessons. Busy kids. Busy parents, too.



You don't have to be a doctor to relate to the lives of Banitt and Barry. But managing complex careers and schedule-devouring responsibilities of parenthood definitely helps these married doctors relate to the lives of their patients.

Starting Out

Banitt, an obstetrician/gynecologist, and Barry, an internist, came to Mary Greeley Medical Center in 2002. A passion for medicine brought the couple together, but their kids brought

them to Ames, where Banitt, the daughter of Dr. Louis and Pat Banitt, grew up.

Banitt and Barry, who is originally from Des Moines, met on their second day of orientation at the University of Iowa School of Medicine. They were together through medical school and then married in 1995, just prior to doing their residency at Banner Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center in Phoenix, Ariz.

"We didn't go there with any plan about where we wanted to eventually practice, but when Chloe was born during the last year of our residency, the idea of being closer to family became appealing," says Banitt.

The new family came back to Iowa, where Banitt joined the faculty of the UI School of Medicine and Barry had a fellowship at the UI Hospitals and Clinics.

Then, Banitt became pregnant again.

"I was relaxed about having a second child. We already had everything-the stroller, the car seat. But then we found out we were having twins," she says. "We were shocked."

That's when they started thinking about relocating to Ames, where they were thrilled to find positions at Mary Greeley Medical Center.

"We were going to need all the help we could get, and it was a blessing having family around," says Banitt.

Married With Children

When the children were younger, they were often watched by their grandparents or a sitter while Mom and Dad pursued their careers. The hours could be long and stressful, and Banitt and Barry were often on call. Something eventually had to give.

"I read once that you can be a physician, a wife and a mother, but you can't be good at all three," says Banitt. "You have to prioritize. That's why I decided to go part-time to make our lives more doable."

Barry and Banitt's situation reflects several findings of a 1999 study of doctors married to doctors that was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The study found that female doctors who are married to doctors are more likely to arrange their work schedules to care for children than female doctors married to non-physicians.

The flexibility with their schedules helps with family life, but it also boasts professional benefits. Spending time with children, especially when they are young, provides a level of satisfaction that can help ease even the most stressful day at the office. It also contributes to the ability to provide the "specialized care, personal touch" on which Mary Greeley Medical Center prides itself.

Banitt says her patients, the majority of them mothers, understand her decision to cut back on work to spend time with her girls. Moreover, having to make such a major decision because of the pressures of motherhood enhances the empathy she has for her patients.

"I feel an obligation to my patients," says Banitt. "That's why I'm still working, why I didn't just quit. This is my chosen profession and I feel strongly about it."

Barry is a hospitalist, working in a specialty area that is quickly growing at hospitals across the country. Hospitalists manage the general care of patients who have been admitted to the hospital.

"I like being at the hospital," says Barry. "I like doing what I can to help people get better so they can get back to their lives and families."

Barry's schedule requires him to work for seven days and then have seven days off. This means working every other weekend and some holidays, but it provides large stretches of time to be with the girls.

Shared Experiences

Banitt and Barry swap medical journal articles that they think

the other might be interested in reading. They've also been known to check in with each other for medical advice.

"Her specialty is the one I have the least interaction with at the hospital," says Barry. "I hardly ever share patients with gynecology. But if something in that area comes up, I often call her first for advice. She sometimes calls me, too, when she has a question that she thinks I can help with."

The 1999 Annals of Internal Medicine study also indicated a significant majority of doctors married to doctors feel a high degree of satisfaction from sharing professional experiences. That's definitely true of Banitt and Barry.

"When you've been at work all day, dealing with various problems and issues, it can be mentally and emotionally draining," says Barry. "We understand what the other person is going through. We can vent about situations, and the other understands."

And, he adds, "being with the kids can totally clear your mind."

That's something any parent can relate to.