

# PHARMACY COUPLES SHARING THEIR LIVES AND PROFESSION



**C**hristopher and Kimberly Cook became fast friends while they were in pharmacy school seven years ago. They took part in a variety of campus activities at the University of Georgia, and wound up spending a lot of time together. They didn't date until their last year in school, but married shortly thereafter.

In 1998, Christopher was working on his Ph.D. and Kimberly was the pharmacist-in-charge at a Kroger Pharmacy in Athens when they learned of an opportunity to invest in an independent pharmacy in the north Georgia mountain community of Clayton, near the North Carolina border.

“We both wanted to have greater control over the pharmacy where we practiced and truly desired to do more patient-centered care,” said Christopher. “We decided the opportunity was too good to pass up and the next thing we knew, we had moved to Clayton.”

Today, the pharmacy couple jointly run Clayton Pharmacy. Kimberly is the owner/managing pharmacist. While sometimes practicing at the pharmacy, Christopher now spends most of his time on the faculty at the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy in the Department of Clinical and Administrative Sciences. Occasionally, he brings students to the pharmacy and recruits patients at a research site.

The pharmacy currently offers diabetes education, diabetes supplies, therapeutic shoe fittings, smoking cessation counseling, immunizations, durable medical equipment sales and rentals, post-mastectomy breast prosthesis fittings, and compounding.

“I have provided clinical pharmacy services when needed,” said Christopher. “We originally worked as relief for each other in the pharmacy—however we found it far better on our family lives to hire an employee pharmacist to replace me. Not only did we avoid the ‘too many chiefs’ syndrome, but the ability for us to have family time together has greatly increased.”

According to Craig Burridge, M.S., CAE, executive director of Pharmacists Society of the State of New York (PSSNY), in the past 10 years he’s seen several pharmacist couples opening their own pharmacies after paying off school loans and/or working for chains. The reason for going into business together varies.

“The number one reason that many couples tell me is children,” said Burridge. “The couples believed that they would have a much more flexible work schedule, if they had their own business when

their young children were at home. In fact, Rochester Drug Coop, a New York state wholesaler, owned by independent pharmacies, helped to establish a

“turn-key” pharmacy with a young pharmacist couple. Initially, the husband worked at the pharmacy so his wife could stay home with their new twins and three-year-old and still help with the business. She could relieve her husband at work and he could relieve her at home, if they chose. I believe a computer was set up at home with the pharmacy’s books and inventory software, ordering etc. As the children grow older and begin attending school full-time and as the busy pharmacy grows, both pharmacists will be spending more time at building their business. What a great opportunity!”

Burridge added that being financially established and having your own independence were other reasons couples decide to go into business together. “Pharmacists want to get some kind of control over their own lives,” he said. “Pharmacists move into their own business so that they can practice pharmacy their way,” he added.

**F**rank and Lisa Odeh are married pharmacists who own Prosperity CARE Pharmacy in Fairfax, Virginia. They decided to go into business together this year because they felt the chain drug stores in their neighborhood in the suburbs of the nation’s capital were not offering the type of excellent patient care services that they felt they were capable of providing.

“We met working for CVS Pharmacy as corporate trainers in Indianapolis, Indiana,” said Lisa. “I have been in pharmacy for 14 years; Frank, 10 years. I handle the human resources and management part





of the business. I also spearheaded the flu clinics. Frank handles the day-to-day operations of the pharmacy. We love working and living together. There are many ups in-

cluding having a very, very competent employee/pharmacist working with me. The old saying—'good help is hard to find,' well, we feel that we complement each other well."

Prosperity CARE Pharmacy specializes in complicated drug regimens, such as those for infertility, hepatitis C, transplants, injectable products, and oral chemotherapy. They also plan to run flu clinics during the fall and winter.

"The reason we chose to specialize in these areas is because we felt that we could provide the personalized first-rate care these patients need," said Frank. "Our location also makes this a natural fit."

**J**ay and Maleah Phipps, also married R.Ph.s., opened their pharmacy, City Drug Company, in McKenzie, Tennessee, about three years ago. "Through a professional contact that we had met by attending a professional meeting, we were asked if we would be interested and accepted," said Maleah. "We currently are the only full-time pharmacists working—however, we have a couple of relief pharmacists that fill in when needed. Jay handles most of the financial side of the business; we share responsibilities on everything else. Jay usually is the one who opens the store each day. I go in to work at 9 a.m., and we both are usually still there at closing. We both try to take a day off each week."

The pharmacy, about 80 miles west of Nashville, is a small apothecary-style operation consisting of the prescription department and a small over-the-counter section. In addition to traditional pharma-

cy services, they offer compounding, pediatric flavoring, and diabetes education.

Maleah said their customers look at the pharmacy as more of a family atmosphere, because of the fact that they are married. "This seems to have enabled us to form closer relationships with our patients," she said.

Maleah added that she and Jay work well together and actually enjoy being so close, "24/7." The biggest challenge for them is finding time for vacations. Later, it also will be babysitting. The two are expecting their first child in January.

Overall, PSSNY's Burrige thinks pharmacy couples working together enhance the pharmacy business. "Having a husband and wife as owners, both being pharmacists, will allow much more freedom to care for patients as business grows," he said. "I think it would help a pharmacy's business grow much faster as patients experience more attention at the counter, which is often lost in understaffed, busy pharmacies. The obvious cost advantage is that the salaried pharmacists are also the owners. This would enable a higher pharmacist-staff ratio than those pharmacies not having a husband-and-wife pharmacist team."

Burrige added, he didn't want to slight those independent pharmacy owners who are not both pharmacists. "Often, the husband and wife jointly operate the pharmacy with the non-pharmacist partner providing significant help in running the pharmacy," he said. "In my more than 10 years working here, I find that partnership to still be the most common." ■

