

## Keeping Family Medicine in the Family

**F**or the physicians at Jersey Coast Family Medicine, work is literally a family affair.

Kenneth Kronhaus, MD, and Kelly Ussery-Kronhaus, MD, the married couple behind the Brick family practice, met during their family medicine rotations at Ross University School of Medicine. During their residency they had to work hard to maintain a balance between their hectic medical school schedules and their private lives. Their work ethic is the same today, even after 12 years of marriage.

“Working in the same field as your spouse does give you a better understanding of the demands on the other person’s time,” says Dr. Ussery. “People will say to me, ‘It must be hard working with your husband.’ But we’re focused on our patients and at our practice, we’re just two colleagues working together.”

The two physicians, both board-certified in family medicine, try to make their office feel like a big family. The practice provides primary and urgent care to patients age 7 and older and follows a team-based model – each physician works with a medical assistant, and all staff are keenly aware of and invested in their patients’ lives.

“Our entire staff is like family. Patients know we will get to know them on a personal level,” says Dr. Ussery. “It’s a very special dynamic, working with families. To care for your patients as you watch their kids age and go off to college, to see parents become grandparents and great-grandparents, to see loss as our patients age – it’s a special bond. Medicine is so fast-paced; it’s easy to fall into the rush of the next patient. Having a connection helps you take a moment and reflect on their lives and your relationship with them.”

That personal connection is what drew both physicians to family medicine. “Family medicine chose me,” says Dr. Kronhaus. “I



like that patients develop trust in you and come to you with concerns and questions. It’s much more of an interpersonal relationship than a patient has with other specialties.”

Dr. Kronhaus and Dr. Ussery treat patients like part of their family, too, including their multi-generational family patients, like the group of sisters who schedule their annual physicals on the same day each year so they can go out to lunch together after. Dr. Kronhaus and Dr. Ussery treat their husbands, parents and children too. “It’s really rewarding,” Dr. Ussery says. “They trust their whole family with you.”

The married physicians have a unique perspective for the couples they treat as well. “When we speak with patients about their relationships and caring for their loved one, it carries extra weight and credence,” says Dr. Ussery. “They know we can relate to them on that level.”

Treating patients like family makes it easy to encourage them to strive for health rather than the absence of disease.

“We focus on preventative medicine – we’re trying to increase the health of our aging population,” says Dr. Kronhaus. “Health maintenance is the focus,” adds Dr. Ussery.

“We advise our patients to see the value in small strides, in making step-by-step improvements,” she says. “We build a focus around lifestyle modifications to manage weight, diabetes and more, and remind our patients that every small victory counts.”

Dr. Kronhaus and Dr. Ussery plan to take their family practice to the next level by taking on a new joint venture. In addition to taking part in CPC+ and Horizon PCMH programs, they are helping to create a new residency program at Hackensack Meridian Health and Ocean Medical Center in Brick, where both physicians are affiliated. The residency programs were just approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, and the months ahead will be spent interviewing and preparing for 2018, when Jersey Coast Family Medicine will be one of the teaching sites for the residency program. Dr. Ussery serves as program director, and Dr. Kronhaus will serve on the faculty.

“We’ve been very forward thinking with the practice,” says Dr. Ussery. “We always try to embrace these projects and look for ways to grow.” ▲