

# MISSISSIPPI Medical News

Your Primary Source for Professional Healthcare News

November 2010 >> \$5

## Physician Spotlight

### Jack Moriarity, MD, & Risa Moriarity, MD

By LUCY SCHULTZE

None of Jack and Risa Moriarity's three young children will tell you they want to be a doctor when they grow up. But if the ambition strikes them later on, they'll have a real head start when it comes to grasping the job's highs and lows.

"I'm afraid the kids have sometimes had to sit through some pretty gruesome conversations over dinner," said Jack Moriarity, a neurosurgeon with NewSouth NeuroSpine in Jackson. His wife is an emergency medicine physician and faculty member at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

"We both love what we do and really enjoy medicine," Jack said, "so we talk about it a lot with each other and with the kids."

Balancing two medical careers with a busy family life has been both a joy and a challenge for the Moriaritys, parents to Lindsay, 9, Lara, 7, and Sargeant, 3.

"My job provides a good lifestyle for a parent because it's shift work: You know when you're leaving the hospital," said Risa, an assistant professor and assistant residency program director for emergency medicine at UMMC.

"I don't carry a pager, so there's nothing that can stop me from getting to my child's soccer game," she said. "I can actually make a plan, whereas for people who are on call, it's a different story."

Raising their family in Mississippi has been a perfect if unexpected fit for the Moriaritys, neither of whom grew up in the South. The couple met at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, where Jack befriended his future NewSouth NeuroSpine colleague John D. Davis IV, MD, a native of Jackson.

Davis returned to his hometown to begin practicing with partner W. Lynn Stringer, MD, and invited Jack to consider joining them.

"He asked me, 'Did you ever think of looking in Mississippi?'" Jack recalled. "I said, 'John, I'm not sure I could find it on a map, and you're the only person I know who lives there.'"

A native of California, Jack was raised near Los Angeles in Calabasas. He received his bachelor's and medical degrees at Stanford University before heading east for surgical training at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. There he completed an internship in general surgery and residency in neurosurgery, and served as chief resident and as a neuro-oncology research fellow.



Risa meanwhile spent her childhood abroad as the daughter of a petroleum engineer. Her family had lived in Venezuela, Nigeria, Indonesia and Liberia before settling in Denver for her senior year of high school.

She attended Yale University for her undergraduate studies, then worked in New York in an administrative job in the medical field before moving to Baltimore for medical school at Johns Hopkins. She met her future husband while she was a medical student there.

After their marriage, she entered the plastic surgery residency program at Johns Hopkins, where her husband still had five years to go in his program. But two and a half years into her residency, she resigned.

"It just wasn't a great fit for me, and the longer I was in the program, the more I realized that it was going to be difficult for both Jack and I to be surgeons and also to have kids," Risa said. "If we had kids, someone else was going to raise them. You can't really practice surgery part-time, and unless we moved next door to my parents or his, I didn't know how it was going to work."

The couple's home life was also chaotic in a way that hardly welcomed children into the mix.

"Our house was a disaster," Risa said. "There were dirty dishes everywhere, bills going unpaid. We were never, ever home and hardly saw each other. The lifestyle just wasn't working."

So Risa shifted gears, taking a year and a half off from her training to do medical writing and editing for a web-based publishing company. Meanwhile, Jack finished his residency and the couple welcomed their first child.

Looking toward their next step, the Moriaritys had always expected to return west — until the Mississippi invitation sug-

gested a different path.

As Jack was out interviewing for a job in California near where he grew up, Risa sat down at UMMC with then-Chair of Emergency Medicine Robert Galli, MD, and found the program there was the fit she'd been looking for.

"It has a lot of the elements of surgery that I enjoyed, in that you get instant gratification, instant results," she said. "A patient comes in and, a lot of times, I can fix their problem in an hour or so."

For Jack, the opportunity to work in Jackson with people he enjoyed in a practice he admired proved too good to turn down.

"Our decision to come here really stunned a lot of people," Jack said. "My family in L.A. couldn't believe it. But while I was still in Baltimore, my father came to visit Jackson and met my colleagues. He said right away, 'I now understand why you're coming here.'"

Since then, the practice Jack joined has evolved into a collaborative spine-care venture that includes a dozen physicians in the areas of neurosurgery, orthopedic spine surgery, pain management and physical medicine.

The group came together as NewSouth NeuroSpine in 2008 to offer a more effective and efficient practice for patients. Its 50,000-square-foot facility in Flowood features 30 exam rooms, digital X-ray and MRI technology, as well as a pain-management clinic and physical therapy center.

Jack's portion of the practice focuses chiefly on cervical spine and lumbar spine areas, with cervical fusion as the most common procedure he provides.

His practice allows him the flexibility to balance his schedule with his wife's shifts at UMMC. On Tuesdays, he takes the kids to school in the morning and leaves the office early to pick them up in the afternoon.

"We run to Sal and Mookie's for a late lunch, then it's on to piano, then soccer," he said.

As the children's activities call for more after-school shuttling, balancing family life with the demands of two medical careers calls for smart scheduling, good communication and a steady sense of life's priorities.

"None of this would work without Risa's incredible organizational skills," her husband said. "She tends to keep it all on track. She's an incredible woman, to make order out of chaos."

## Making Time for Music

Balancing the demands of work and family often leaves little time for other pursuits, but the Moriaritys find a way to make it work.

"So much of our time is spent on the sidelines of soccer games, we don't have a lot of time for hobbies," Risa said. "We each sort of have one hobby: Mine is tennis, his is playing guitar."

The latter is a skill Jack began developing through about two years of lessons he took while at Stanford University.

"I started playing guitar right at the beginning of medical school — which is not the best time to pick up your first instrument," he said. "Once I got into my clinical years and residency, I literally never touched it."

Jack picked up his guitar again after arriving in Jackson, joining his partner Lynn Stringer in a cover band that played at events like weddings and a New Year's Eve party at the country club.

Most recently, he's been playing as part of the worship band at Bellwether Church, a United Methodist church plant that meets at Jackson Academy.

When the church began in 2007, the founding group encouraged Jack — who'd chiefly played electric guitar before then — to purchase an acoustic one. Now he plays both instruments as part of the worship band.

For the California native, playing music is akin to another great love he now has less opportunity to enjoy.

"Playing guitar is like surfing, in that it's one of two things I do that I find totally engrossing without ever feeling like a chore," he said.

"It's totally absorbing in those moments where you get lost in the song or in the ocean. Like in surfing, you brush up against something bigger than yourself and have that sense of being swept away."

