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Helping Parents Find a Pediatrician

By Claudia Anrig, DC

One of the more difficult questions to answer is when a parent asks, "Doctor, can you refer me to a pediatrician?"

This question isn't as simple to answer as the parent may think. How do you find a pediatrician who will render the best care for a child being raised in a wellness paradigm? Does a child need a pediatrician? The answer is probably yes, although a healthy child may need access to pediatric care only on rare occasions.

If you provide a chiropractic wellness practice, you are most likely the primary doctor for many families. The wellness practice evaluates, corrects or reduces the vertebral subluxation complex. These patients have been educated to understand that the adjustment allows for the improvement of function and well-being in the body.

This generation of parents also understands that its children may require care by other health professionals, should there be a time for diagnostics or treatment of a disorder that is unresponsive to chiropractic care; or a case that is outside our scope of practice.

To provide the answer to the parent's question, you need to begin by finding a pediatrician in your community to whom you feel comfortable referring. Interview those of your own patients who are health care professionals; ask for a list of whom they think are the best and the worst. (The latter list will be particularly useful.)

There are several questions that need to be answered for you to feel comfortable and confident in recommending a pediatrician. First, realize that your expectation to find a wellness-minded pediatrician in your community may not happen; you have to find the best you can, and communicate to parents the upside and downside of using the pediatrician you are referring. If your parents are well-informed in advance, you are less likely to have troubles in the future.

Since you need to address several questions, involve your staff in the project. Start by conducting an in-office survey with your young families. The information you gather has a dual purpose: to collect information about the pediatricians in your community; and to allow you the opportunity to open a conversation with parents about choosing the right pediatrician for their children.

Possible questions for your in-office survey include:

1. Is the pediatrician you are currently seeing wellness-minded?
2. Does your pediatrician promote good nutrition?
3. Does your pediatrician promote breastfeeding?
4. Does your pediatrician routinely prescribe antibiotics for every cold or suspected ear infection?
5. When your pediatrician suspects your child has an ear infection, does he or she perform a culture to confirm the necessity for an antibiotic?
6. Will your pediatrician take a "wait-and-watch" approach to a fever?
7. When you inform your pediatrician that you are not interested in vaccinations for your child, are you still treated warmly?
8. Will your pediatrician return your phone calls the same day?
9. How many times has your child received a prescription in his or her lifetime, and why?
10. How long do you usually have to wait at the pediatric office?
11. Does your pediatrician have a separate area for sick children?
12. Does your pediatrician have an office that is clean and "kid-friendly?"
13. Does your pediatrician have a friendly office staff?
14. Does your pediatrician know that your child is under chiropractic care?
15. If you could have a wish list for a great pediatrician, what would it be?

(Use a separate sheet for this answer, if necessary.)

The Meeting Between Chiropractor and Pediatrician

Once you have a tentative candidate list, contact the pediatrician's office and arrange a visit. A one-on-one meeting is the only way to walk away with the answers. When calling the pediatrician's office, let the staff know you are interested in finding a doctor to recommend to your patients. Arrange the first meeting at their office; the doctor will feel more comfortable in his or her environment, and you will have the opportunity to

see the office and evaluate how it is run. Should the first meeting go well, extend an invitation for lunch and a short tour of your practice.

The Questions

Your questions for the meeting can come from the patient survey. Remember, it is highly unlikely you are going to find a holistic pediatrician in your community. What you are looking for is the philosophy of the doctor on certain health issues. Inform the doctor that you are looking for a pediatrician who takes a less invasive approach for children, since the parent of the child you will be referring is interested in this style of health care. Don't be abrasive or expect to change a doctor's belief system or practice. Keep in mind that this may be the doctor's first encounter with a family chiropractor; assure him or her that you are interested first and foremost in the well-being of the child.

A Relationship With the Other Doctor

A relationship of any kind will take time to develop. Don't expect the doctor to embrace you in the beginning. Take time to slowly introduce information that could cultivate and broaden his or her knowledge of wellness. Should an interesting article or Web site about wellness come across your desk, forward it to the pediatrician. When you find there is an issue on which the two of you strongly disagree, agree to disagree, then ask to initiate a healthy academic debate.

For example, you will encounter few pediatricians who are "antivaccination." Ask them if they are interested in a continuing dialogue, and if you could order them a subscription or refer them to the NVIC Newsletter (www.909shot.com) as a basis for your discussion.

Do not send literature that is not scientifically referenced. Remember, these doctors were educated that their protocol for care is based on science (even if some of it is bad). Providing unreferenced chiropractic literature may support their belief that we lack higher educational training and an appropriate scientific foundation.

Be aware that in respect to their protocols for medication use, many pediatricians accept the risks or side-effects of the therapy as an inherent aspect of treatment. As your relationship with them builds, let them know more about family chiropractic wellness care. They will need to be educated that we in chiropractic don't treat a disease or disorder, but assist the body to improve its function from "dis-ease." In the best of both worlds, it would be an asset for each of our families to have their health care team consist of a healthy

partnership between a family wellness chiropractor and a wellness-oriented pediatrician.

Claudia Anrig, DC

Clovis, California

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