



The Right Prescription

Pediatricians, parents must work together for the best health of children

By Joe Cooney

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Back in the day when doctors made house calls -- yes, they actually did that -- a sick child was examined, diagnosed and the physician prescribed a treatment.

Do this, take that. No questions asked.

Oh, how times have changed.

"Back then doctors were gods," says Dr. Florence Rosen from her office at Advocare Cherry Hill Pediatrics.

"Today parents just don't accept what the doctor says. Especially with the Internet, parents are much better read and much more aware. So they've got more questions."

As such, relationships between parents and doctors have become more open and more friendly over the years, doctors say, proving what studies have shown -- that children do better when parents and child care providers are on the same page.

A 2004 report from the Johns Hopkins Children Center cited that the medical community recognizes that "the clinician-parent relationship is the centerpiece of primary care (for children)."

"It's what we call 'family-centered medical therapy,'" says Dr. Ben Rosenblum, a practitioner at Advocare's Atrium Pediatrics in Marlton.

"It used to be, 'Yes, doctor, no, doctor' for the parents. But we encourage having the family participate. We want to discuss with the parents the various issues and options regarding their children."

Rosenblum says Atrium offers prenatal interviews for prospective parents.



"I think it's best for new parents to talk to a couple of different doctors. But most parents don't do that. They will just go with a recommendation from a friend or their obstetrician.

"But we feel it's important and beneficial to meet a doctor first. See what the office is like and ask questions. We want to make sure the parents have a comfort level, and that our practice jibes with their own philosophy," said Rosenblum, the Chair of Virtua Hospital's Pediatric Performance Improvement Committee.

Rosen says that in the case of parents with newborns she'll ask a lot of open-ended questions to ascertain their concerns and fears. "And I tell them (the parents) that if I say something they're not comfortable with to ask me about it."

Moorestown resident Nicole Milstead, who recently brought her 8-year-old daughter Juliet in to see Rosen, said she has been bringing her four children to the Cherry Hill office for about 10 years.

She said she has developed a "great" relationship with Rosen, and that she has never been afraid to talk with Rosen or the other two pediatricians at the practice, Drs. Bruce Taubman and Jennifer McHugh.

"I probably shouldn't, but I actually call her Flo," Milstead says of Rosen with a laugh. "I ask a lot of questions, and I'm completely comfortable asking her anything. I have no fears talking with her. None."



Judy Alberto, mother of six, has been traveling from her Gloucester Township home to Cherry Hill for 18 years. She said she was referred to Rosen by her OB-GYN.

"When I first had my kids I just didn't involve my pediatrician as much," Alberto, a pharmacist, said. "But we have established a relationship and it's been very helpful.

"We respect each other," Alberto said, adding that she and Rosen disagree on whether or not her girls should receive a vaccine that can prevent cervical cancer. "But she respects how I'm raising my kids," Alberto says.

Vaccines and antibiotics are two hot-button issues that still may throw up a barrier between doctors and parents, says Rosenblum, citing the Internet as the culprit.

"The Web can be a double-edged sword," says Rosenblum. "Parents are more informed, but what is the quality of that information?" he asks. "It could be misleading, or it could be downright wrong.

"When a parent comes in with information they've gotten off the Web that they think is accurate it can create difficulties."

The unproven correlation between vaccines and autism is the most prevalent of the Internet misnomers, said Rosenblum.

"To this day many parents will not vaccinate their children at all," he said. "That's a tragic decision."

Rosen says she's "really upset" with the vaccine/autism issue.

"All the studies have debunked the connection with autism. And to see those misconceptions still keeping parents from giving their children vaccines, it's terrifying."

As for the antibiotics?

"I've actually lost patients from time to time because I refused to prescribe an antibiotic," Rosenblum said.

"It used to be (a parent's mindset) that if you're sick you need an antibiotic. But over the years we've worked hard to educate parents that antibiotics are not always warranted."

Rosen concurs with her colleague.

"We're very cautious," Rosen says about prescribing the antibiotics. "I'll tell parents, for an ear infection, for example, to watch and wait. But if pain medication doesn't take care of it, or if a child has a horrible looking ear, we'll have them get a prescription filled.

"But one thing we'll never do is prescribe an antibiotic over the phone," Rosen added. "That is an absolute rule."

Both Rosen and Rosenblum have been seeing children for more than 20 years. And the relationships they've developed have spanned generations.

"I'm seeing grandchildren of original patients," Rosen says with a wide smile. "It's a wonderful thing. I must say that it warms the cockles of my heart."

"I don't know about grandchildren of patients," Rosenblum chuckles. "But just last week a former patient walked in with his new baby. It's very rewarding, very gratifying."