



A Rationale for Making Your Practice More Child-friendly

■ Emory Petrack, MD, FAAP, FACEP

When speaking with physicians and urgent care owners about services for children and families, the question sometime arises, “Why focus on pediatric care?”

The short answer: Because it’s the right thing to do in terms of both patient care and building your business.

I do not advocate turning your general urgent care center into a pediatric urgent care center, although such centers do exist. I do, however, advocate creating a new focus on pediatric needs that enables you to view your center—waiting room, treatment rooms, equipment, training and medicines—through the eyes of children and families.

There are advantages to operating a child-friendly urgent care center. It is also important to bear in mind that there are differences between treating children and treating adults.

Based on experience in my own practice and in my consulting work with other urgent care providers, I estimate that pediatric patients typically account for anywhere from 20% to 40% of visits to urgent care. As providers and often (as in my case) as parents, we should care passionately about providing great clinical care for this important segment.

That passion can pay great dividends not only from a clinical perspective, but also from a business perspective.

Given that a significant proportion of urgent care visits are for pediatric care, focusing on this population aids in market differentiation, creates a competitive advantage in your geographic area, and enables an increase in pediatric market share. As your center offers both real and perceived improvements in customer experiences, patient satisfaction increases. And as your facility becomes better known among parents and families as “the place to go” for excellence in pediatric care, you

are better able to attract and retain outstanding, dedicated staff.

Clinically, it is admittedly obvious that you can provide better care to children when your facility is equipped to do so.

For example, child-sized masks work better on asthmatic children than do adult-sized masks; smaller blood pressure cuffs provide more accurate measurements in tiny arms.

Similarly, performing minor procedures on minor patients is easier with the right tools (e.g., applying an analgesic patch before IV placement, or a gel before suturing).

In addition, keeping up to date with pediatric standards of care can enhance the quality of care while simultaneously reducing medical–legal risk.

As noted, a small number of urgent care centers already provide services exclusively for children. Other facilities are now turning attention to enhancing their level of pediatric care to leverage their market share.

I believe that enhancing the experience for children can lead to increased adult volume, as parents tend to remember the exceptional experiences you provided their children. I recall one mother saying to me after an urgent care encounter, “I really didn’t expect such a great experience for my daughter. I may be back later with *my* mother!”

Quite simply, improved care for our younger patients makes sense and gives you a huge opportunity to grow your business.

In a recent column (*JUCM*, January 2009), Editor-in-Chief Lee Resnick, MD pointed out that 25 million to 75 million potential urgent care visits per year are “out there.” Even if only 10% of such visits entailed caring for children, the bottom line is that millions of children could (and many would argue *should*) receive urgent care—some of those potentially in *your* facility.

We owe it to children and their families, and to ourselves, to take full advantage of this unique opportunity to serve our community.

Future columns in this quarterly series will offer concrete suggestions on how to tailor your approach and make your facility shine when treating younger patients. ■



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