

## **(Published in Hampden County Monthly)**

By Dr. George Hepner MD and Neil Nordstrom RN

It is often said that caring for a happy, healthy well-adjusted child is one of the most demanding and challenging of all individual accomplishments. Fortunately, it's also the most rewarding. Still, tending to a newborn is a demanding job that's a learning process for both parents and the baby. Parents have to learn to interpret the reasons why their baby is crying, and then figure out what to do to make the baby happy. Babies cry for numerous reasons—when they're hungry, overtired, or have a wet diaper. Parents must try to determine what is causing their baby's stress, often by trial and error. New parents, especially, may have trouble reading their baby's cues and responding appropriately. The baby may continue to cry simply because of needs that have not yet been met. Before long, parents learn to acknowledge their baby's cues and tend to their needs. This will help the parents gain more confidence in caring for their baby and improve their judgment and parenting skills as the baby grows.

Babies thrive on love and attention. The first years of life have a direct impact on a child's physical, mental and emotional growth, but as every parent will tell you you'll come up against a situation in which you need help. Help is available. Your pediatrician is someone you can turn to for advice on everything from comforting a crying infant to handling the unavoidable colds, painful earaches, sore throats, and other common childhood illnesses. Developing a solid working partnership with your pediatrician can help reinforce your judgment and build your confidence in your parenting skills. The pediatrician will see your child through many social, emotional and physical developments as he or she grows into young adulthood. Thus, the relationship you have with your child's pediatrician should be one of respect and most importantly, trust. In many ways, your pediatrician will become your most important healthcare advocates and the relationship should feel like a partnership.

Advocacy as defined by the dictionary as a “Method by which patients, their families, attorneys, health professionals, and citizen groups can work together to develop programs that ensure the availability of high quality health care for a community”. It is also defined as “Pleading a cause on behalf of another”. Pediatricians are advocates for the care of children in the community.

Pediatricians advocate for those less fortunate due to catastrophic illness so that they eventually may develop into healthy adulthood, guiding not only the patients but also their families to achieve goals as productive citizens. With the improvements in technology, it is now possible to diagnose potential newborn conditions before the birth of the newborn. The pediatrician can prepare parents for any special care that their baby may need, and in some case can treat disorders before birth.

Even healthy infants, however, have days when they don't feel well. In general, if there are any symptoms such as fever, a cough, or diarrhea in the first 3 months of life, your pediatrician will want to see the baby to evaluate whether there is an underlying condition that should be treated. Childhood is a time of radical growth and development. Pediatric

well-child visits are most frequent when the child's development is at its peak. Each visit to the pediatrician within the first year of life includes a complete physical examination, assessing the infant's growth and evaluating his development. During this time the pediatrician will keep tabs on your baby's overall health and troubleshoot any problems that arise sooner rather than later. You can expect your doctor to check your baby's height, weight, and head circumference; give him an examination to ensure that he's properly developing and provide immunizations at the appropriate intervals. Such preventive care is important for the overall well-being of your child.

Pediatric Services of Springfield has two convenient office locations: 294 North Main Street in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, and 35 Post Office Park in Wilbraham, Massachusetts. We are now accepting new patients for both locations. For more information or a free consultation please call 413-525-1870 or visit us on the web at [www.pediatricservices.org](http://www.pediatricservices.org).