

FINDING THE PEDIATRICIAN THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU
SUDHA CHANDRASEKHAR M.D., F.A.A.P.

“We just found out we are going to have a baby!”

“We are new to town.”

“Our insurance changed and we need a new doctor.”

“I'm not really happy with my physician.”

These are some familiar circumstances under which a family begins its quest for a Pediatrician. A Pediatrician is a physician who specializes in taking care of children from birth to the age of 18-21 years. **A good pediatrician is not merely a doctor, but a wise ally who counsels you through your child's crucial formative years, ultimately becoming a trusted friend.** Based on my 15 years experience as a Pediatrician, here are a few pointers on how to choose one that best suits your needs.

Pediatricians practicing in the US are required to complete a 3-year residency training in an accredited hospital. The abbreviation F.A.A.P. signifies “*Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics*”, indicating that they are Certified by the *American Board of Pediatrics*. In a sense, it is akin to being “**bonded and licensed**” by one's professional peers. Feel free to check out www.bomex.org for physicians licensed in the state of AZ. The Board of Medical Examiners provides the public with information regarding physicians, including complaints filed against them, malpractice claims etc.

When preparing for a **new baby**, especially the first baby, the family often puts a lot of thought into choosing an obstetrician they feel comfortable with. The Pediatrician almost always comes as an after thought. How can you be better prepared in this situation?

1. Community Pediatricians often teach the newborn classes at many hospitals. You may find someone you like when attending this class. Get his/her business card and schedule a “**Meet the Doctor**” office visit (usually complementary).
2. Go through the list of Pediatricians offered by your **insurance carrier** and ask your OB to recommend a few from the list. Schedule “Meet the Doctor Visits” with a couple of practices a few weeks before your due date.
3. Have a **list of questions** ready when you meet with the Pediatrician such as: office hours, after hours triage policy, same day appointments for sick visits, views on breast feeding, circumcision, immunizations, etc.
4. **Location! Location! Location!** Always try to find a practice that is reasonably close to where you live. Driving a long distance with a sick child in the car is neither fun nor advisable.
5. Ask your Pediatrician if he/she makes **hospital rounds** where you will be delivering. The current trend is to have Pediatric Hospitalists do hospital rounds, and Pediatricians to follow in the office.
6. You will be asked to name your Pediatrician when you check into the hospital in labor. Don't be caught in a situation where you have no choice, and are assigned the Pediatrician on call, because you have not planned ahead of time.

The location of the Doctor's office and office hours should suit your convenience. If you are a **working mom**, check to see if the clinic has special early morning, late evening, or weekend hours. Who answers for your Doctor after the office is closed? Is it a professional telephone triage service? Are you satisfied with their responses? During office hours, are there nurses who can effectively triage your telephone calls and offer you prompt appointments for a sick child? Is there easy access to a lab, X-Ray and Pharmacy?

You may have chosen a Pediatrician based on his/her **word of mouth reputation**. When you visit the office, make sure you feel at ease with the front office staff, the nurses as well as the physician. Perhaps you share a **common culture and language** with your doctor that helps you feel more comfortable asking certain questions or discussing certain issues. Do make sure that social relationships don't interfere with professional doctor-patient **confidentiality**.

Your Pediatrician's ability and willingness to **champion** your child's rights, for example when dealing with insurance companies is valuable. Is she able to **recognize** your child's needs outside of the medical arena, such as dealing with the school regarding educational issues?

Does your child have special health or educational needs? The **experienced physician** knows to make the appropriate referrals to specialist(s), but still remains the "**the captain of the ship**" by coordinating care.

Some Pediatric offices employ **midlevel practitioners** such as Physician Assistants (PAs) or Nurse Practitioners (PNPs) who work under the Pediatrician's supervision. PAs and PNPs often see children for minor ailments. Verify your ability to see your Pediatrician whenever you feel it is necessary.

The **age and gender of your child** may influence your decision making process. When looking for a new Pediatrician for a young adolescent or teenager, do seek their preference. Even children who have been used to the same Pediatrician for years may become embarrassed as adolescents when examined by a physician of the opposite sex. Is your teenager comfortable talking to his Pediatrician privately and in confidence? As a parent, are you able to trust such a relationship?

As you can see, many factors determine your choice of Pediatrician. Above all, you should instinctively sense the "**correctness of fit**" not only by your own comfort level, but also by your child's response. Most Pediatricians tend to be jovial, fun loving people who truly enjoy taking care of kids over the duration of their childhood/adolescence. If it doesn't feel right, don't hesitate to explore your options. **Once you find someone you like, you will value the nurturing relationship provided by a good Pediatrician.**

Dr. Chandrasekhar is a Board Certified Pediatrician who will be opening her Pediatric practice in Chandler in November 2004.