

Pediatricians find challenges and many rewards

by RON AARON EISENBERG

From educating parents about whether children need antibiotics to protecting youngsters from cancer, today's pediatricians say their jobs keep them busy — but also feeling rewarded.

"I love my job," said pediatrician Ryan Van Ramshorst. "I just love going to work every day knowing I'm making an impact on children and their families."

One of the biggest challenges faced today by pediatricians is helping parents understand when antibiotics should be used.

He and his colleagues prescribe them only when truly needed, Van Ramshorst said. According to the latest research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, evidence indicates that "unnecessary antibiotics can be harmful by promoting resistant organisms in (a) child and the community."

Dr. Leah Jacobson said at her practice, Through the Years Pediatrics, she often tries to discuss with families when it's right to take antibiotics.

"We consciously try to limit prescribing antibiotics. Over the years the tendency was to offer an antibiotic whenever a parent requested one for their children," said Jacobson, a board-certified pediatrician and a Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

According to the academy, about 10 million antibiotic prescriptions are written every year for upper respiratory infections that likely won't improve from antibiotic use.

Plus, unnecessary antibiotic use puts children at risk of side effects or a potential allergy to the medications, and increases the risk of antibiotic resistance by bacteria, AAP researchers said.

Another issue Jacobson has seen is parents choosing not to vaccinate their children.

"One of the first things we do with new patients is discuss vaccinations with their parents," said Jacobson, a mother of three who serves on the Bexar County Medical Society board of directors. "If a parent says they do not want their children vaccinated, we politely tell them our practice is not for them and encourage them to seek out another pediatrician."

She added, "We are seeing diseases

in children we thought we wouldn't see again, like pertussis — whooping cough."

That disease is largely preventable with the vaccination DTaP — a three-in-one vaccine protecting against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, physicians say.

According to the CDC, children who haven't received DTaP vaccines are at least eight times more likely to get pertussis than children who received all five recommended doses of DTaP.

Pediatricians also recommend the vaccine that fights the human papillomavirus, or HPV, which causes several cancers including cervical cancer in girls and genital warts in boys, for children 11 and 12 years of age.

The HPV vaccine was embroiled in a political battle in Texas a couple of years ago when Gov. Rick Perry wanted all children in the state to be vaccinated.

That flap led some parents to refuse the vaccine, known to many as Gardasil.

"We need to do better getting more girls and boys vaccinated with HPV because that will save lives," Van Ramshorst said,

The CDC reports cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among

women around the world. In the United States, about 12,000 women get cervical cancer every year and some 4,000 are expected to die from it.

According to HealthGrades.com, there are an estimated 633 pediatricians within 25 miles of downtown San Antonio. So how does a parent pick one?

Experts suggest talking to friends and neighbors for recommendations.

For more information on pediatricians and children's medical care, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website at www.aap.org.

WE CONSCIOUSLY TRY TO LIMIT PRESCRIBING ANTIBIOTICS

DR. LEAH JACOBSON

EDITOR'S NOTE: Author Ron Aaron Eisenberg and his wife, Gina, have a special interest in pediatrics. They recently adopted three children — a girl, Reagan, born in September 2011; and twin boys, Kennedy and Carter, born May 2013.

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