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PARTNER IN HEALTH | *by Keri Mitchell*



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Parents should follow their instincts in finding Dr. Right

When Mandi Christensen, her husband and their four daughters moved from Omaha, Neb., to the Denver area for a job opportunity, one of the many things they left behind was a pediatrician with whom they had a 17-year relationship. Finding a new one was a top priority after the move.

"We've had some major medical catastrophes between four children," Christensen says. "I wanted to find somebody I was comfortable with before we had an emergency." She asked around and settled on Advanced Pediatric Associates. After two or three visits with other doctors, she met Dr. Danielle Clancy. "It wasn't that I didn't like the others; they were just fine." Christensen says. "But when I met Dr. Clancy for the first time, I felt like, 'This is the one. There's no need to look any further.'"

Not all parents feel that way about their pediatrician, but they should, Christensen says — and her pediatrician agrees. If their doctor is not the right fit, parents need to know that it's OK to switch, even within a practice. "You really need to find someone you feel comfortable seeing for the next two decades," Clancy says. "That's what we like, too — going through the ups and downs with families." Many doctors offer complimentary pre-natal visits, and Clancy encourages parents-to-be to take advantage of the opportunity.

Follow your gut and desires

"Sometimes it's not even so much about what you ask but what you're feeling when you walk into the office," Clancy says. "Is it a pleasant environment? Is the staff pleasant?"

Parents also should consider what they want in a practice. An office with several doctors is more likely to offer services such as same-day sick visits and night or weekend hours. A smaller practice often is a better choice for families wanting to see the same doctor at each visit.



Dr. Megan Lucero treats pediatric patients in the North Suburban Medical Center emergency room. Among them are families who couldn't get in to see their primary care physician, and others who did but want a second opinion.

Lucero knows from her experiences that families need to be able to connect with their pediatricians. "Doctors, just like everyone else, have different personalities," Lucero says. "You and your doctor are basically working as a team to figure out what's wrong with your child and the best way to take care of them, so if there are personality or communication issues, that's not going to be an effective relationship, even if that doctor is the smartest doctor in the world."

Breaking up isn't hard to do

If something feels amiss? "My suggestion, without hesitation, is to find a different provider," Clancy says. "When it comes to the health and well-being of your child, you have to have that trusting relationship and be confident with that person you're entrusting with your child's care."

This is important enough to Clancy that on rare occasions she has found herself breaking up with a family, so to speak. "If I get the sense that things aren't going well, I'll say, 'I feel like we're not connecting, and maybe it would be good to see a different provider,'" Clancy says. "We would rather sacrifice our egos and have them see somebody else than feel like we're not giving them good care because we're not seeing eye-to-eye."

If an isolated incident with a doctor or staff member causes bad feelings, talking it out might be enough, Lucero says. "But they need to feel free to change doctors. That's an OK thing to do. Ultimately, they need to trust their instincts." In a large place like Denver, there's no shortage of excellent physicians, Lucero says. "You'll likely find someone who's a better fit for you."