

Doctor blends old methods, new technology

By Kristan Zimmer
Editor

Gone are the days when doctors knew all their patients by name, came to your house for a check-up and sometimes just pulled up a chair next to you for a fireside chat.

His office is far from old-fashioned, but Dr. Erik Cohen is bringing tradition back with his new practice on Old Post Road No. 2 called Next Generation Pediatrics.

"I became a dad and I learned," Dr. Cohen said. He is a board-certified pediatrician who has worked for four years in a private primary care office in Simsbury and a pediatric emergency department at a hospital in Hartford.

"I just got tired of several things," Dr. Cohen said. He didn't like not knowing his patients or getting time to spend with them. He didn't like sending his patients to another doctor in the emergency room for IV fluids or stitches because he didn't have the time or supplies.

Now with two of his own children, Maximilien, 4, and Gabrielle, 2, he knows, personally, the angst of doctor visits with a child.

A regular pediatrician sees about 30 to 40 patients a day. Dr. Cohen set up his practice in



Dr. Erik Cohen, a pediatrician, has set up practice in Greenwich, taking on only six to eight patients a day.

— Kristan Zimmer photo

Greenwich so he will not take more than six to eight patients a day. Fewer patients mean more time. Patients do not have to spend as much time in the waiting room. His check-ups can last for more than an hour instead of 15 minutes. He talks to the children who come into his exam rooms and he has created an

environment in each room that makes children feel more comfortable to do so, he said.

The walls in his first two exam rooms are painted with bright murals of jungle animals and trucks. The exam tables are shaped like a hippo and a truck. In his "teenage" room with a lounge chair, posh black and

white motif, video games, magazines and a television, makes teens feel at ease and give them something to talk about. They also give Dr. Cohen an opening to connect with teens when he needs to talk to them about personal issues such as anorexia or

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domestic abuse.

Dr. Cohen also provides house calls and will go with his patients to other appointments with specialists so that parents feel more comfortable and don't have a disconnect between doctors. He said he respects the work of all specialists whether it be for physical therapy or herbology and naturopathic medicine.

"They are just as much a part of the care as anything," Dr. Cohen said. While he wouldn't make a determination as to whether a child should take medicine based on what the parents want, he does believe the family's beliefs or preferences should be taken into consideration when treating the child. Spending time with each child and parent enables him to get to know each family and where their priorities lie.

His way of practicing is traditional but his office is fully modernized with high tech equipment to make each appointment as comfortable as possible. As patients come into the waiting room, a desk with computer and phone are there for parents who want to get some work done while waiting with their child. Instead of toys or a playhouse, Dr. Cohen offers children an

interactive game on the floor of the waiting room. The electronic pad on the floor responds to children's motion and shadows allowing for entertainment without the spread of germs because kids don't have to touch it.

"The whole idea is to make things a little more functional for everyone," he said.

Instead of paperwork and files, each patient's information is stored in an electronic tablet. The hand-held computer stores not only the child's medical files but also diagrams and pictures that Dr. Cohen can use to explain things to parents such as how an ear infection looks and how best to treat it.

"I very much like educating the parents," he said. His tablet goes home with him, too, so in the case of an emergency parents may call him 24 hours a day and he has all the information at his fingertips. He can also send prescriptions directly from the office to the pharmacy so it can be ready for pick-up when patients leave the office and avoids prescriptions written in the traditional "doctor scribble," which can be misread.

His office has a negative pressure room and he can administer IV fluids among the "extras" he

offers his patients.

"We found it unbelievable, his service," said Catherine Fraise, mother of one of Dr. Cohen's patients. Her daughter suffers from cyclical vomiting syndrome. She used to have to take her to the emergency room at the hospital each time a fit of vomiting came over her. Now Dr. Cohen comes to her home and sends over his pediatric nurse to set up her IV fluids from her own bed. He also coordinates with her specialists to get to the heart of the problem. Her daughter has been to the hospital 12 times in seven years. "For us it's a huge relief," said Ms. Fraise.

"He's open to alternative remedies and responsive to my needs as a mother," she added. "If I don't want antibiotics, he will look into all sorts of ways we can treat without antibiotics."

"His staff is out of this world," said Shelley Steinberg, owner of Graham's Kids Cuts in Greenwich. She first met Dr. Cohen when he opened his practice in town and the two felt they shared similar visions for their businesses, gearing their service toward children. "It's clean, it's not chaotic... Graham didn't want to leave the front room with the screen on the floor. It's very wel-

coming.”

Ms. Steinberg said Dr. Cohen talked to her son about what to do when he met a stranger and how much TV he watched and answered his questions.

“He knows what he is talking about and he is up to date on everything. He does his homework. When he comes back to you with a suggestion it’s a well-thought-out plan,” Ms. Steinberg said.

“I want someone I can call if there is a real emergency,” said Ms. Fraise, “who can come and speak to my doctor and have all the records on hand. That’s priceless. It’s not expensive for what it is. It’s such a gift.”

In order to keep the numbers of patients down Dr. Cohen doesn’t take insurance, which can be a hurdle for some patients. But those who can afford it say it’s worth it.

“In a world where people are rushing too much and feel overburdened and underappreciated, you don’t get the sense from him he would rather be something

else, doing something else. He makes you feel you are really in a good place,” Ms. Steinberg said. “That speaks volumes to me, these days especially.”

Dr. Cohen has a bachelor of science degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a master’s

degree in physiology and biophysics from Georgetown University. He graduated with a medical degree from Temple University. For a complete résumé, visit Nextgenerationpediatrics.com.

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