

Happy February! I guess Punxsutawney Phil of Groundhog Day notoriety was accurate about the 6 more weeks of Winter. I can't remember a Winter with this many snow/flu days- especially spread out over numerous weeks. The inconsistency is definitely not helping with the learning, and I'm sure the day-to-day change of work/school plans is increasing the stress levels in most homes. Hopefully warmer weather and a little consistency is around the corner for everyone's sake.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY DIRECT PEDIATRICS!

Direct Pediatrics opened its doors on Monday February 19th, 2024 and it's hard to believe that we're a year old today. That first day, we saw one patient and by the end of the week 10 patients had been seen. Between the two offices, we're at 257 patients, which is pretty amazing since the average Direct Primary Care (DPC) office is lucky to have 100 patients at the end of the first year. As always, we can't thank you enough for trying out Louisville's first pediatric-only membership-based practice as we aim to at least meet, and hopefully exceed your expectations for a pediatric office for your family.

SPEAKING OF MEETING & EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS...PSYCH TESTING!!!

This Monday we welcomed Emily Moran to the Direct Pediatrics team. Emily is a licensed psychological associate who has done cognitive, academic, behavioral & psychological testing for the Trimble County schools for the past 6 years. As soon as all her testing materials arrive (hopefully by the end of this week), she will begin doing testing to evaluate for learning disabilities, dyslexia, ADHD, giftedness, anxiety, depression, developmental delays, autism and other childhood mental health issues. She will meet with parents prior to testing to determine exactly what information the parent wants and what questions need to be answered. The testing will be customized for the individual child and after the testing is complete, Emily will meet with the family to go over results and provide them with a testing report which can be used by schools as needed for accommodations. The cost for a comprehensive evaluation for non-members will range from \$2000-\$2500 with Direct Pediatrics members paying 50% (\$1000-1250). If you have questions or would like to get your child scheduled, call Hannah at the Landis Lakes office at 861-6067.

WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

Pharmacy updates; I added another antibiotic (Augmentin) to our pharmacy. While it's not my favorite antibiotic due to common GI side effects, it is the first line treatment for animal bites and infected lymph nodes so I wanted to make sure we had it in stock.

400...OR MAYBE 300

My plan had always been to max out at 400 patients at this office. This would be 20% of my patient volume at my old office and would basically guarantee that families would always be able to be seen when they needed to be seen. In fact, we've had many families sign up since the New Year because they became so frustrated with not being able to get into their pediatric office (let alone their preferred pediatrician) and were told to go to urgent care or the ER due to lack of available appointments. With the high flu numbers, I had two weeks where I was seeing 50 patients a week and as a result, I'm considering maxing out at 300 patients instead of 400. I'm currently about 60 away from 300 and will probably be full by summer. If you're on the fence about signing up your child (or sibling) at the Norton Commons office, you may need to get off the fence sooner rather than later or risk missing out!

DIRECT PEDIATRICS- LANDIS LAKES

If you live in Lake Forest or Landis Lakes (or know people who do), please encourage them to check out our 2nd office in the Landis Lakes shopping center right across the street from Lake Forest. Dr. Stewart is incredible and the location couldn't be more convenient.

IS THIS SUPPLEMENT/VITAMIN/HERB/NON-PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE/ESSENTIAL OIL HELPFUL?

Short answer...probably not. Here are some of the issues...

- Anything that does NOT claim to treat a health condition is NOT tested or regulated by the federal drug administration (FDA). The FDA only gets involved if there is a problem after people start taking it (postmarket enforcement).
- To make sure they are NOT regulated by the FDA (which requires proving that a medicine is safe and effective), these products claim to "boost immunity," "improve focus" or create "happy mood" "alertness" "fortified gut" etc. and will never claim to "treat the flu" or "reduce cold symptoms." If they claimed to treat a medical condition, then they would fall under FDA regulations and would be forced to prove that taking their product actually produces improvement. Since they are not regulated by the FDA they can basically claim whatever they want, but have to include the disclaimer, "this product is not intended to "diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease" or something similar
- Homeopathic products are even trickier, as they have fallen into a gray area where they have to list "homeopathic" on their product, CAN claim to treat a disease, but are not regulated by the FDA so no one is evaluating that they are safe and effective unless they start causing problems- at which point the FDA intervenes. For example, the company that makes homeopathic Oscillocochinum has had to settle 2 class action lawsuits for false advertising that their product has any medicinal qualities (it's actually just duck liver and duck heart- which was labeled in Latin on the package) and that it cures the flu (it doesn't).
- But what about the claims that "studies have shown" that a product is effective? Well, there is good research and there is poor research. For example...
 - Randomized controlled trials (RCT); This is the gold standard of research. Participants are randomly assigned to the treatment group (take the medicine) or the control group (take the placebo- a fake medicine that looks identical to the actual medicine). Neither the participants nor the evaluators know if a person is in the medicine group or the placebo group. All participants are evaluated for medication effectiveness and side effects over time. After the evaluations are complete, researchers and participants are informed who was in the medicine group and who was in the placebo group. If the people in the medicine group do much better than the people in the placebo group, the medicine is thought to be effective and can safely claim that it treats a particular illness. If there's no difference or bad side effects in the medicine group, then the medicine is considered ineffective. Medicines approved by the FDA have undergone numerous RCT trials. Companies that produce supplements, herbs, homeopathic meds, oils, vitamins virtually never do this kind of research and when independent groups do this research on these products, they almost always find that they are not more effective than a placebo.
 - Perhaps even better than an RCT is a metaanalysis which evaluates all the RCTs on a particular medicine as well as lower quality research and generates a conclusion about whether something is effective. My go-to site for metaanalysis is cochranelibrary.com. If you ever have a question about the effectiveness of a medicine, go to that website (or just message me and I'll do the research for you)
 - Cohort studies; This type of research looks at a group of people who all take a medicine and see how they do on the medicine over time. The problem with this type of research, especially if it's run by a supplement/vitamin/etc. company, is that all the participants and evaluators know that the people are on the medicine so everyone is biased. The company wants to be able to say the medicine is effective (as may the participants if they are paid by the company to be in the study) and may unintentionally (or intentionally) over-report positive effects and under-report negative side effects. Since there may not be a control group to compare to, it will not be clear if the medicine helped, or if they would have improved just as fast (or faster) if they had not taken any medicine. A study like this is better than nothing, as at least it would highlight if a medicine were horribly unsafe, but would not convince me to try their product.
 - Case reports, expert opinion, anecdotal evidence; This is the weakest level of research/evidence and primarily used by these companies. It's basically the equivalent of finding an expert to say that the product is excellent (without any evidence), or going on facebook and telling people that your flu went away after taking Vitamin C (hate to tell everyone, but research also doesn't support that Vitamin C does anything for a cold or the Flu- it's also not regulated by the FDA so it doesn't have to prove anything).
- So what- why does it matter? Well, often it's just an issue of wasting money, but sometimes these non-medicines can be harmful to whomever takes it. Here's how absurd it can become. There was a school

where many of the teachers had been convinced that a particular product was critical for preventing them from getting sick during cold/flu season. Unfortunately, the particular product had a proven history of worsening allergies and asthma in allergy/asthma prone kids and no evidence of preventing cold/flu. When the product was banned from the school, many teachers were upset as they feared they were going to become sick based on the claims of the product. Having already researched the product and finding no evidence that the product did anything useful, I spoke with the product marketer who explained that "a research paper from experts at Johns Hopkins showed that [this product] was effective at improving immunity" (big red flag as there are not any accurate ways to measure "improved immunity"). I asked to see this "research" and was given the paper. The company that sold the product had rented a room on the campus of Johns Hopkins University and had the company's "experts" (definitely not Johns Hopkins' faculty members) state that their product improved immunity so that they could state "experts at Johns Hopkins claim..." This was about as misleading as could possibly be, just to be able to put these claims on their website to increase their sales. Technically not false advertising, but come on!

- The take home point is that Dr. Stewart and I are happy to look into any new treatment you've heard about. I will say that in the past 19 years, the only medicines my kids have taken have included a few antibiotics, Zofran for nausea/vomiting, Tylenol, Ibuprofen, claritin, and saline nasal rinse (not a medicine, but really useful)!

DR. JOHNSON NEWS/TRAVEL

3 weeks ago my sister and her husband adopted a newborn baby (after being on the waitlist for over a year)! This Friday afternoon we will be heading to Charlottesville, VA to meet our new nephew, but will be back in time to see Moulin Rouge in Louisville on Sunday evening. If you have a question, don't hesitate to text me. If your child needs to be seen, Dr. Stewart will be available to see my patients at the Norton Commons office this weekend.

Enjoy a Leap Day-free February!

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