

Questions for Pediatricians (and their practices)

— Ellen Keyne Seebacher

Go through this list and see which questions are most important to you; you may not have enough interview time to ask every one.

For the front desk

- What hours are you open? Are there evening/ weekend hours for sick kids? How do you handle after-hours questions or problems?
- Do you have walk-in hours? If not, can we be worked in (i.e., make a same-day appointment) for pressing issues?
- Are there separate office hours for sick kids and healthy kids? separate waiting areas?
- How many babies/children do you see at an average time? (To judge how busy office will be and how easy to make appointments.) Or: how long is the average wait in the waiting room?
- How many doctors are there in the practice? Are there plans to add any? Does a doctor always see the child or is it sometimes a nurse? If the doctor practices solo, who is in charge when s/he is unavailable?
- Do you provide an advice nurse and/or phone hour, when we can call with questions and/or speak with the doctor? If so, during office hours, outside, or both? when is s/he available?
- Is the doctor prompt about returning calls? Does s/he have a set schedule?
- Do you have a laboratory in your office?
- How are emergencies handled (is there a 24-hour service)?
- What hospital(s) does the doctor have admitting privileges with? Where would our child go in an emergency? Who would care for our child if s/he had to be admitted?
- How much do you charge for routine checkups? after-hours visits or consultations?

- Do you take our insurance?
- Will you take care of insurance billing for us?
- Do we have to pay at each visit?
- What are our payment options?

For the doctor

- Can you respond to non-pressing questions by electronic mail?
- When are you available by telephone? How do you feel about taking phone calls from concerned parents outside the “phone hour”?
- How do we contact you after business hours? Who would be on call after hours, you or somebody else?
- Who covers for you when you are unavailable? Do you have affiliations with other pediatricians in the area?
- What do we do in case of a medical emergency?
- Can you be present immediately following the birth? How much would you charge?
- How do you feel about Hep B vaccine at birth? routine Vitamin K injections in breastfed babies? heel sticks for PKU and other at-birth testing in breastfed babies? (what about substituting a cord-blood sample?)
- If you cannot be at our birth, how soon afterward would you want to see the baby?
- How often do you want to see babies for well-baby care?
- How much time do you schedule for a well-baby checkup? (Should be at least half an hour to allow time to answer questions.)
- What are your standard procedures for well-child checkups? Do you do tests on the child’s development, or just take updates from the parents?



- Do you follow a set schedule for immunizations?
- Are you board-certified? by whom?
- Do you do medical research or teach at any medical school?
- What are your areas of special medical interest (e.g., allergies, child development)?
- What's your philosophy on treating sick kids? Do you generally recommend intervention or letting illnesses run their course (before, for example, using antibiotics for ear infections and other common ailments)?
- Do you have any qualms about parents remaining in the room during painful procedures?
- How do you feel about exclusive breastfeeding? Do you work with a lactation consultant?
- When do you recommend starting a baby on cereal or other solids?
- How do you feel about routine circumcision? co-sleeping? pertussis and chickenpox vaccinations? working mothers breastfeeding?
- Do you offer advice on strictly behavioral issues?
- Does the doctor take time to answer questions? Do we feel pressured?
- Does the doctor relate to us well -- doesn't act like the authority but the partner? does s/he expect parents to be knowledgeable consumers or just accept what s/he says?
- How well does the doctor communicate with us? (Use the philosophy questions to assess this....)
- Does the doctor involve both parents equally?
- Is the doctor personable? Do we feel comfortable with him or her?

For us

- Is the office easily accessible?
- How does the office work? Do we like the nurses and staff? How do they treat us? Are there enough staff members? What's the waiting room like for us?
- Is the office "kid-friendly"? Is there a nice play area with clean toys in the waiting room? friendly examining rooms? unthreatening clothing on the staff?
- Is the doctor late for the interview/meeting?
- Do appointments consistently run late? (Ask parents in the waiting room.)
- Does the doctor volunteer information or wait for questions?

