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MERCY CHILDREN'S CLINIC LAUNCHES CHRONIC CARE MEDICAL HOME

Connecting team of physicians, specialists and nurses ensures proper management of chronically ill children's total care, treatment and progress

FRANKLIN, Tenn. – Feb. 4, 2009 – Responding to the tremendous need to manage the total care of patients with chronic illnesses, Mercy Children's Clinic recently launched their groundbreaking Chronic Care Medical Home.

Chronically ill children often see several specialists, have multiple surgeries, make numerous trips to the emergency room and are prescribed several medications, so it's even more critical to have systems in place to track the total care of these children.

The program, which has already garnered national attention for its innovative approach, connects physicians, treatments and manages prescriptions to ensure proper medications are received. The program assigns a team of physicians, nurses and a caseworker to track each child's treatment and progress. "Approximately 60 percent of our patients are living with chronic illnesses," said Amy Vehec, M.D. "Integrating all of the medical issues into a comprehensive plan can be complicated and requires a team that is committed to working together to achieve the best possible outcomes."

Rebecca,* the mother of a chronically ill son that has a rare genetic syndrome call CHARGE, equates managing his care to a traffic controller. Jacob* sees 19 different specialists at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. "It's like having 19 different planes trying to land at the same time. An air traffic controller is needed to coordinate efforts, which is what Dr. Vehec does for us," said Rebecca.

"Jacob has several complex heart defects and has already undergone two major heart surgeries with another planned for this spring. He has choanal stenosis, renal reflux, hormonal issues, severe gastric reflux, neurological issues, and the list goes on. On top of it all, he is immune-deficient and is constantly battling infections."

Because of Jacob's heart, anesthesia is a major ordeal for him. So whenever he is anesthetized, the specialists want to accomplish as many procedures as possible. This requires a chronic care team to sort out which procedures can be done together, in what order, and to coordinate all of the necessary medical staff.

Rebecca continues, “We have a standing weekly appointment with Dr. Vehec during which she checks each of his major systems and addresses anything new for that week - there is always something. Without this extra time Dr. Vehec spends with Jacob, I am not sure I would know whether he has an ear infection or if his heart was functioning properly, or if he is retaining water.”

Caring for chronically ill children is also administratively complex. Having a single physician advocate from Mercy Children’s Clinic is required to manage appointments with specialists, physical therapists and family service providers in addition to handling the processing of insurance.

Mercy Children’s Clinic has a staff of more than 40, including seven pediatricians and a child psychologist. Physicians see an average of 60 patients each day with approximately 60 percent of those being chronically ill. About 25 percent of these patients have private health insurance while the rest are either uninsured or are on TennCare.

With the number of uninsured children rising and the tremendous need for the management of chronically care patients, Mercy Children’s Clinic constantly evaluates the community need and is looking at expanding the program into other counties.

** The patient and his mother’s name have been changed to respect their privacy.*

About Mercy Children’s Clinic

Mercy Children's Clinic is a Franklin-based nonprofit organization that provides primary pediatric healthcare to children from all socio-economic backgrounds including children without health insurance or enrolled in TennCare. Since 1999 more than 8,000 children from 24 Middle Tennessee counties have called Mercy Children's Clinic their medical home. For additional information visit www.MercyChildrensClinic.org or call 615.790.0567.

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