A Pediatrician’s View

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The General Pediatrician as Dermatologist

This month’s issue of Pediatric Annals focuses on infections of the skin and soft tissues. Our Guest Editor, Ron Dagan, MD, Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Pediatric Infectious Disease Unit of Ben Gurion University’s Soroka Medical Center in Beer-Sheva, Israel, has called on other experts in infectious diseases and in dermatology from Israel and the United States to provide current information about common bacteriologic, viral, and fungal infections of the body’s integument, its largest organ, and the one most exposed to microorganisms that cause these infections.

It is important for practicing pediatricians to learn what these authors have to say, because infections of the skin and soft tissues are the primary reason for one in every 40 visits to pediatricians, and skin diseases, per se, account for one in 18 such visits—skin diseases that must be differentiated as either of infectious or of other etiology. Further, 25% to 30% of patients cared for by general pediatricians will have some form of chronic or recurring dermatologic condition, and 21% of all visits to pediatricians will involve, primarily or secondarily, a skin complaint or a skin “finding.” Thus, it is safe to say that pediatricians see more infants, children, and adolescents who have dermatologic conditions, including those of infectious etiology, by a long shot than do dermatologists and infectious disease subspecialists combined. General pediatricians, therefore, are the primary care dermatologists in our health-care system. They see more skin diseases than does any other group of practitioners, and they diagnose and treat most of them without calling on their dermatologist and infectious diseases colleagues for consultation.

A review of the table of contents in one recently published general pediatric textbook (guess whose) reveals the following list of chapters specifically related to dermatologic diseases or presentations:

- acne
- alopecia and hair shaft anomalies
- animal bites
- bacterial skin infections
- chicken pox
- contact dermatitis
- contagious exanthematous diseases
- diaper rash
- drug eruptions
- eczema
- enterovirus infections
- Henoch-Schönlein purpura
- herpes infections
- hirsutism, hypertrichosis, and precocious hair development
- hyperhidrosis
- idiopathic thrombocytopenia
- insect bites and infestations
- Kawasaki disease
- lyme disease
- meningococcemia
- parasitic infestations
REFERENCES

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