

03/04/09 - The Importance of a Pediatrician



When a couple is expecting a child through pregnancy, they have the luxury of waiting to select a pediatrician until they are near to their known delivery date. The main things they will look at when deciding who to use may be the location of the office, the office hours, the personality of the doctor and staff and the general feel of the office itself. They are able to talk to any of their friends or neighbors for recommendations of what doctor they should interview.

Couples who are adopting have to approach selecting a pediatrician a tad differently. They probably should not wait until they are matched with a child or potential Birthparents before selecting a doctor. They probably should not even wait until they are finishing their paperwork before interviewing doctors. The things to help them choose their pediatrician will be the same as those listed for the couple expecting via pregnancy. In addition, they will have questions specifically about adoption for the doctor. The adoptive couple should specifically ask other adoptive parents about their pediatricians and not just choose one because their friends or neighbors recommend them. Other adoptive parents can let you know what pediatricians? offices are adoption friendly.

Why Choose a Pediatrician So Early?

The best time for an adoptive couple to interview and choose a pediatrician is once they have made the decision to adopt and selected their agency or lawyer. The reason not to wait until you are closer to receiving your child is because the doctor can be an invaluable resource to you early on in the adoption process. They can help you well before your child enters your home.

Within the mounds of paperwork a couple must fill before they can adopt a child, there are questions about what medical situations they would be comfortable accepting. If it's not in the paperwork, then their adoption social worker may discuss these topics with the couple during the Homestudy interviews. The couple needs to decide a "Yes?", "No?", or "Will Consider?" for certain medical issues concerning the Birthfamily, the pregnancy or the child.

Examples which include the Birthfamily may be a family history of deafness, alcoholism or diabetes. Examples which include the pregnancy may be use of marijuana, cigarettes, or cocaine. Examples which include the child may include difficulties with attachment, cleft palate or low birth weight.

Before you fill out the paperwork, discussing these medical issues with a pediatrician can be very useful. You may not know what all the medical terms mean or whether or not they are genetic. There could be some issues, such as autism, which have such a broad spectrum that a medical doctor could easily explain what you could be taking on by accepting that condition in a child.

Another reason to have a pediatrician early in the process is it is possible that you could be presented with a potential adoption case very quickly. Even if your agency said it would be months before you could be selected, there is always a chance that a case will come along that other couples passed on but it may suit you. When I was still filling out paperwork for my third adoption, our agency contacted us with a potential case. The situation involved some medical conditions in the Birthmother. We were able to contact our pediatrician and get accurate answers to help us with our decision of whether to consider the adoption case. Never did I expect us to have to make a call to our pediatrician before we had mailed in our final paperwork.

Help With Prescreening

While you are waiting for "The Call" to say you have been matched to an adoption case, you may get other phone calls from your agency. They may be calling to prescreen a case for you. Some agencies prescreen every adoption case while others only prescreen if there is something "different" about a case. The case could be different because of finances, medical issues or something else. After the case is presented to you, you need to decide whether or not you want your profile to be considered by the Birthmother.

At this point, your emotions are all over the place. You know that there is finally a real chance that you could get a child soon. If the prescreen is due to a possible

medical issue, you have to take into consideration if it's realistic for your family to handle. The important thing to remember is what decisions you made as a couple when you weren't emotionally invested in a case. This is when a pediatrician can be extremely helpful.

We were prescreened quite a few times over our three adoptions. Some we said "Yes" to and some we had to pass on. By calling and discussing the adoption cases with our pediatrician we were able to get accurate information on topics we were unfamiliar with. What are the odds of a child being bipolar if the Birthmother is? What effects would be on a baby if heroin was used every weekend for the first four months of the pregnancy? If the child is the result of a rape, what are the odds of the child being aggressive? By calling and talking to a medical doctor and not searching for answers on the internet, we knew we were getting the best information.

Help Once You're Matched

If you are adopting internationally, you can also be prescreened for cases due to medical concerns. But a pediatrician is most valuable for international adoptions when the couple receives their referral for their child. The couple may receive a video or photographs of their child. They could have medical forms or reports from the child's current caregivers. Going over all of this information in detail with the child's pediatrician will assist the couple in understanding their child better, knowing what medical questions to ask the agency and caregivers, what trouble signs to look for in their child while in their child's home country, and other helpful tips. If the pediatrician sees something that concerns him about the child's referral, then he can give you specialists' names. Having a medical support system set up for your child prior to them arriving home is invaluable.

For domestic adoptions, once you are working with potential Birthparents, it's nice to have a medical doctor to call and inquire about anything related to the pregnancy. If the potential Birthmother had test results then we would contact our pediatrician to interpret them for us to understand. Your OB/GYN would also be a helpful resource in these situations.

Help When Meeting Your Child

Having a pediatrician before we adopted was also helpful as an additional resource when we were at the hospital picking up our new child. We had good communication with the hospital doctors, but if we had additional questions or concerns it was comforting to call our own pediatrician. Before we traveled to our

home state after adopting our child, we also made phone calls to the pediatrician from our hotel to ask basic child care questions. He understood the stress of our situation and was always willing to drop everything and help us in any way possible.

I know several adoptive parents who adopted internationally that used their pediatrician as a resource when they were in their child's home country. They would either call or e-mail their pediatrician and ask questions about any concern they had about their new child's behavior or health. There was a doctor in country to assist them, but most of the new parents felt most comfortable discussing issues with their pediatrician from back home.

Talk to Other Adoptive Parents

Seek out other Adoptive Parents and ask for their child's pediatrician's name. Having a doctor who is very familiar with the adoption process will make things easier. You are overwhelmed enough with everything that you don't need to spend your energy teaching a doctor about adoption. He/she should understand that if you call with a question about being prescreened then you need an immediate answer. Sometimes you cannot wait until the next day for a response because it may be too late to be considered. If you are traveling out of state or country, you also need a doctor who can be flexible with when and how they can communicate with you.

Also, ask the pediatrician how many patients they currently have who were adopted in their caseload. The more children from adoption who are seen should up the odds that the staff understands adoption situations. You are less likely to receive insensitive comments such as, "So does their real Mom have a history of blindness?" You want your child to be as comfortable as possible at their pediatrician's office. The more welcoming the doctor and staff are toward your family formed through adoption, the better.

Take your time in order to find the best pediatrician for your child and your family. You need to find someone who understands the adoption process, is flexible due to you possibly traveling to receive your child, and is sensitive to adoption issues. But don't take too long finding this doctor as they can be a wonderful ally for you throughout the entire adoption process.

To help you in selecting an adoption friendly pediatrician, visit the [American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Adoption and Foster Care](#).

Danielle Pennel

Three Yellow Roses

www.threeyellowroses.com

Are there any other tips on selecting a pediatrician for those who are adopting?