

Care of Adolescents

In our country the upper age limit for pediatric population conventionally and arbitrarily is deemed to be twelve completed years as far as medical curriculum and practice is concerned. As the child crosses into the teenage, the pediatrician usually cuts himself off from the child's problems. A child grows under the care of the pediatrician, develops congenial relationship with him/her and also develops faith and confidence in time her. As the child enters adolescence between 10 to 10.5 years of age, the pediatrician is still there for consultation and guidance. But, as soon as his/her psychological and physical development enters the complex phase of adolescence, the child no longer finds the familiar face of the pediatrician by his her side. In our society, inhibitions still exist in the family circle. So, the adolescent child should have the availability of the familiar pediatrician for his anxieties and clarification regarding changes occurring inside the body and mind. The pediatrician, who has been monitoring the physical and psychological growth and development right from early infancy through childhood, should also be available for monitoring the adolescent period since he/she is better equipped to do so by virtue of familiarity with and practice of the skill than the medical physician looking after the fully grown

adult population. In other words, there is a strong case for the pediatrician to make his/her services available to the child till he/she attains the age of at least 18 years.

As far as medical problems are concerned they do not drastically change between twelve and eighteen years of age. In fact, many children with chronic illnesses like epilepsy, rheumatic heart disease, nephrotic syndrome, bronchial asthma, leukemias, thalassemia, *etc.* continue to seek and get attention from the pediatrician for a great length of time beyond 12 years of age. This is also necessarily true for endocrinal conditions like short stature and puberty related problems.

Therefore, I propose that the Indian Academy of Pediatrics should initiate appropriate action to bring children up to 18 years of age under care of Pediatricians. The training and curriculum of the students and practitioners of pediatrics should be suitably strengthened in the field of adolescent medicine to better equip them to handle the day-to-day problems of adolescents. At the same time, the pediatricians who are involved in the super-specialty of adolescent medicine, particularly the endocrinal problems have the responsibility to continue to develop the specialty.

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