

# Caring for Children Community Wide

*By Judi Engle*

After more than two years as professor and chair of the Department of Pediatrics for Wright State University School of Medicine, Art Pickoff, M.D., can list some changes. The most obvious is the increase in the number of faculty members in general pediatrics. This development indicates a keen interest in how pediatric care is delivered and what happens outside of the academic medical center. Working in a community-based medical school brings academicians closer to “real life,” and the collaborations benefit both.

“This department has always provided outstanding clinical care,” Dr. Pickoff explains, “and our subspecialists are an extremely, critical component of the medical school, the hospital, and the community. That anchor has to be there. The Division of General Pediatrics speaks to an emphasis on primary care and the importance of understanding the nature of practice in the real world. We need to know what’s going on in the community, the obstacles and restrictions that general pediatricians, family practitioners, children and families face.”

The new division is now the largest one in the department and is developing mission statements and goals, including educating medical students and residents, being a community resource, encouraging scholarly activities, providing primary care and preventive services, and advocating for children.

Child advocacy takes several forms. One faculty member is working in communities to implement legislation for bicycle helmet use. Another heads up the lead poisoning initiative in Montgomery County. Dr. Pickoff’s personal interest as a pediatric cardiologist is in the prevention of heart disease in children and smoking cessation programs. He has been involved in the enforcement of laws that restrict access to and use

of tobacco by children. Another faculty member is director of the Sunset for Kids Clinic. To address community needs, faculty regularly volunteer at Sunset Clinic for a free, walk-in clinic on Monday evenings. “We see some very complex and sad cases there,” says Dr. Pickoff, “and we are always in need of volunteers.”

Another departmental change is a stronger emphasis on research and scholarly activity. The department had a record number of publications and presentations given at national pediatric meetings this year. “The quality of work was excellent and ranged from basic science to general pediatrics,” says Dr. Pickoff. “This year we are on par with many institutions much larger than ours.”

The research mission, contends Dr. Pickoff, is absolutely necessary and links closely with clinical care. This mission is also reflected in the year-old Division of Child Health Research. This division is examining large databases of children and families to sort out the factors that influence child health positively and negatively. For example, the Division of Child Health Research recently presented a paper at the Society of Pediatric Research on maternal depression and how this has direct implications for raising healthy children.

Research indicates that roughly 20 percent of a child’s overall health is attributable to visits to a doctor, immunizations, and medications. The majority of child health involves other factors, such as loving families, adequate nutrition, adequate exercise, and a safe environment. High-quality clinical care cannot compensate for the lack of these factors.

Dr. Pickoff notes that Dayton is unique in some ways. It is a community with a wealth of resources, he believes, and one where people are willing to collaborate. “In some, more classic, academic medical centers, people are protective of

their niches and their ideas. Here the flow of ideas and the willingness to do things together is significant and gratifying,” says Dr. Pickoff.

A good example of that is a new partnership, called HealthLink Miami Valley, that brings together key players to discuss how to improve access to care and how to coordinate care for underserved and uninsured individuals throughout the Dayton area. “We believe the community has what is needed to meet the health care needs of children and their families,” says Dr. Pickoff. “What we are still a little short of are the integrated mechanisms where we bring the care to children and their families and vice versa – getting the kids that need care to the providers.” This partnership, and others like it, help ensure a coordinated community-based effort for health care delivery.

The teaching mission for both medical students and residents continues to rely upon voluntary pediatricians throughout the community. “We are very much dependent upon their assistance for our teaching mission,” says Dr. Pickoff. “We highly value that help and will work to make that experience as rewarding as it can possibly be. Our students and residents greatly appreciate the efforts of voluntary teachers in the community. They are vital, and to a great extent responsible, for the high quality of students and residents that we have produced. They need to take a lot of credit for that.”