Survey: Pediatricians Make Numerous Diagnostic Mistakes

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Nearly half of more than 700 pediatricians and pediatric trainees polled admitted to difficulty diagnosing between viral and bacterial infections in children, according to a study published in *Pediatrics* and reported by HealthDay News.

Researchers surveyed the health care workers from three sites in Cincinnati and Houston about delayed, wrong or missed diagnostic errors. While scientists didn't question the extent of harm caused by these errors, previous studies showed 32 percent of pediatric malpractice claims involved misdiagnoses.

Survey findings showed nearly half of pediatricians and 77 percent of pediatric trainees reported misdiagnosing a child once or twice each month. Pediatricians said the most common reason for blunders was failing to get information from children's medical histories, exams or charts.

In addition, pediatricians said parents also played a major role in misdiagnoses of children's illnesses. The doctors cited parents' failing to seek immediate care for their child, ignoring follow-up recommendations and failing to investigate abnormal lab tests.

To reduce misdiagnoses, doctors need closer patient follow-up, improved teamwork between members in the health care team and more time to spend with patients, pediatricians said. They also suggested that docs get better electronic health records access and diagnostic decision support tools to help them make more accurate diagnoses.

But besides doctors using cutting-edge medical technology, it's important that patients become empowered to ask physicians questions if they're uncomfortable with a diagnosis, said Geeta Singhal, MD, senior study author.

"It's OK [for parents] to ask the doctor to elaborate more or help them understand better," Singhal said.

Other medical conditions that children's health professionals misdiagnosed included medication side effects, psychiatric disorders, appendicitis, asthma and ear infections, according to the

survey.

Read *RH*'s "A Shot––or Not?" to learn why pediatricians recommend you get your children vaccinated.

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