

FAMILY COPING SCENARIOS

Mrs. Wright is a 46 year old mother of six. Her last child, Amelia, is 18 months old and was born with Down Syndrome. Amelia has heart problems and has been diagnosed as hearing impaired. Her husband, William, works late hours as an engineer for a biotech company. Lately he has been putting in even more overtime in order to pay mounting bills.

One of her teenagers was recently stopped by police for a curfew violation and was put into a redirection program for possession of alcohol. Another child who was formerly a good student has developed academic difficulties. The Wrights are Mormons, and have had strong support from their church.

Mrs. Wright works very hard to keep her home and family running smoothly. She drives the younger children to soccer and music lessons, prepares dinner every night, and cleans her own house. She also attends an early intervention program with Amelia two days a week, and takes her to numerous medical appointments. She is growing concerned that Amelia does not seem to be progressing as rapidly as other children in the class. In the past, she has laughingly referred to herself as a perfectionist. When she sees you in your office, she complains of being tired. She wonders if she is anemic. When you suggest she is doing a great deal, she says brightly, "There just aren't enough hours in the day. I used to go to bed at 1:00 a.m. and get up at 5:30 a.m. I guess I'll just have to start getting up at 4:30." What do you say to Mrs. Wright?

Mrs. Elliot has two children, Martin, twelve, and Robin, an eight-year old boy diagnosed two years ago with acute lymphocytic leukemia, and currently in remission. Robin had a difficult course of chemotherapy, and eventually had bone marrow transplant. In the past six months, since he has been in remission, you have seen him in your office 14 times for various vague symptoms, including stomach ache, headache, congestion, and sore throat. He has also made multiple unscheduled visits to his oncologist. Today Mrs. Elliot informs you that Robin wants to play baseball on the local Little League team, but she doesn't think he is strong enough yet, and would like you to convince Robin not to play. You discover from Robin that his dad, who played college softball, is encouraging him to join the team. Robin's older brother who is a standout pitcher. What do you say to Robin? What do you say to Mrs. Elliot?

Janice and Tim Johnson are a couple in their mid-thirties. Dr. Smith has seen Mrs. Johnson frequently for a variety of complaints, including headaches, lower back pain, colds, fatigue, and vaginal infections. Mr. Johnson has been seen only twice during a three year period, once for a fractured thumb and once for a gash on his forearm that had become infected. The Johnsons have been married 12 years. Mr. Johnson is an independent contractor and Mrs. Johnson is a full-time homemaker. They have two children, Michael, three years old, and Rebecca, six. Michael is a normal, healthy toddler. Rebecca has spina bifida. She has had corrective surgery, resulting in a colostomy. She also has serious visual problems and allergies, as well as developmental retardation. She has had repeated hospitalizations for pneumonia and gastrointestinal

infections. Rebecca has a regular pediatrician and several specialists involved in her care.

Dr. Smith sees Rebecca frequently because she often comes along on her mother's office visits. Sometimes Mrs. Johnson seems to be "getting her foot in the door" with her own health problems in order to ask Dr. Smith's advice about her daughter. She frequently consults him about procedures and medications suggested by Rebecca's other physicians. She also often calls whenever Rebecca has any symptoms of illness.

Rebecca's illness episodes are a source of serious conflict between the parents, with disagreement centered around whether Rebecca needs to be seen by a physician. Typically, incidents of illness in Rebecca resulted in considerable maternal stress and anxiety, followed by a series of advice-seeking phone calls and finally taking Rebecca to the doctor, often on an ER basis. Mr. Johnson accuses his wife of being hypochondriacal about their daughter's health. What might Dr. Smith's role be in this family? What are some possible goals for the family and how can they be achieved?