

MONICA STRAATMAN PEDS REFLECTION PROJECT OCT 31, 2016

If there is one lesson that particularly stood out during my pediatrics rotation, it is the importance of parenting. The impact that a parent has on the child's life and future are immeasurable. In reflecting upon this, I conceived a metaphor that parenting can be related to gardening. Once the seeds are planted, they will not grow and develop into beautiful plants and flowers unless given meticulous care, nourishment, and love. Without sunlight, water, protection, and room to grow, the plant will wither and die, if even getting the opportunity to grow at all. Similarly, children are the seeds that need many things to grow and succeed in life. If the parent, like the gardener, is able to meet these needs for the child, he will have the best chance of growing healthily into adulthood.

During my rotation, I saw many different types of parents and parenting styles. Several examples stand out to me. There was the mom who allows her son to "be the boss". Upon interviewing this mother, it was evident that the son controlled his mom. Many questions were asked about the patient's behavior- being a picky eater, still drinking from a bottle and wearing diapers at over three years old. Most of the answers involved some form of "he doesn't want to" or "he won't let me". But how is a three-year-old boy to know what is good for him? Another parent continues to allow her child to eat as much unhealthy food as he wants, even though he is now considered obese, has an elevated lipid panel, and education was provided on the risks associated with his weight. This child seems to be set up for failure. He is five years old and is already in suboptimal physical health because of poor nutrition- something that is quite preventable. To me, this almost seems negligent of the parent. These are just a couple manifestations of the effect of parenting on the development of children out of the many that came to the clinic.

On the other hand, I had the pleasure of meeting a mother and her 13-year-old son who had a terrible metabolic disorder that left him quadriplegic, severely delayed, and unable to communicate. This particular diagnosis typically carries with it a death sentence before two years old. This mother was so nurturing and took such great care of him that he has survived years past what medical professionals have predicted and seen with other patients. To me, this is not a simple miracle but a prime example of love and excellent parenting that surpasses most others.

Through these examples and many others, I learned that adults, with all their faults and attributes, are made in childhood. Raising children is an enormous responsibility, and I feel that part of our job as physicians is to help guide parents in this process, giving them knowledge and insight necessary to be better parents. However, there is an obvious limit to what we can do so we must accept factors that we cannot control even though it may sometimes be difficult. A child is a wonderful gift, and as physicians, we must do our best to protect them and help them to grow into beautiful, good-hearted adults because they are our future.