

Hospital Happenings April 2010

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. How are we doing as a nation regarding child abuse? How can we come together as a community to prevent child abuse? I am a general pediatrician with special training in child abuse and hope to answer these questions.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), 2008 saw the lowest child victimization rate in 5 years. Still, about 3 million referrals of abuse or neglect were made to protective services. Of these, 900,000 were confirmed. That's 12 of every 1000 kids! Most referrals come from professionals who are "mandated reporters" (social workers, law enforcement, medical and mental health workers).

Maltreatment includes neglect (60%), physical abuse (20%), sexual abuse (10%), emotional abuse (5%), medical neglect (2%), and other (including intrauterine drug exposure). Boys and girls are equally harmed and most kids were white. The incidence of maltreatment is twice as high in children with disabilities. In at least 70% of the cases, adult substance abuse is a factor. Currently, there are half a million children in foster care in the US.

Most often, the perpetrator is the child's parent, with the next most common being an unmarried partner of a parent living in the home. 1500 children die each year as a result of maltreatment and 80% of these kids are < 3 years old. Half of the deaths are due to neglect.

So, how can we help? Report suspected abuse and do it right away. Report domestic violence. It will save a life.

There is a national initiative from the American Humane Society called The Front Porch Project. We don't see many front porches anymore- but the idea is to become involved in the lives of those around you and create community. We've all seen a parent struggle with a screaming toddler. How often have we seen a child alone in a locked car or playing unsupervised in the street or by our canals? Could we offer to hold that screaming toddler or pick up the neighbor's child so they aren't left home alone? Could we baby-sit to give stressed out parents a break? We used to have block parties. These all work to create community.

For more information go to the American Academy of Pediatrics or The Front Porch Project websites. It takes all of us to take care of "our kids". Thanks for your help.