

## Is Your Phone a Hair Shirt?

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Pediatricians do a lot of telephone business: diagnosing, prescribing, encouraging, and talking (lecturing?). Our numbers are in the phone book; it is an open invitation. When you are just starting out and sitting at your desk reading boring medical journals, it is a pleasant break to have someone call about their child. It is even flattering. We can show erudition, enthusiasm, and even some sympathy hoping they will take the bait and make an appointment. It is a good practice-builder.

Because children usually have but one disease at a time, it is easy to make a diagnosis by the history alone over the phone.

Mother: "He's had a cold for a week and now the mucus from his nose has turned green; his fever is up to 101 degrees and he is pointing at his right ear; and he has been crying in pain all night."

Smart doctor: "I'll bet he's got an ear infection. Do you want to bring him in?"

Smarter mother: "Can't you just call the local pharmacy?"

Depressed doctor: "Okay, but you have to bring him in after a few days to see if it is healed." I didn't have the nerve to charge for the calls. If I told the office manager to send a bill for each phone call, I was afraid she would quit.

Then, I found this method was helpful to me and the parents of the sick child: I kept a daily log of each call that came to me. Also, if I saw a sick child on Monday, I would write down the name, the phone number, and the treatment on the page for Tuesday. I would call and ask the mother how Eddie is today.

Mrs. Splugato: "How nice of you to call. I've never met a doctor who did that. Yes, he is better; what now?" I would tell her how important it was to continue with the medicine for seven days and let me see him at the end of the treatment time.

You chiropractors can do that. Use the list of the patients you saw on Monday so you will remember to call them on Tuesday. I assume, however, if your adjustment has been satisfactory on Monday, you will know it before they leave your office. Maybe you ought to call on Tuesday anyway to let the patient know that you are interested. "Is it holding?" If so, you can then reinforce what you said on Monday about lifting, straining, diet, and lifestyle.

I used the phone as an epidemiological research tool. Flu would always start in the 289-0000 numbers, and in a few days would sweep into the 288 and 287s. Then it would jump over the river to the 228 and 222s and get down south to the 771 and 774s. In ten days from the start, it had gone west to Beaverton (644,646) and east into Gresham (661 to 669s). People would call to see what disease was in their area. I also found there was an IQ range and a unique method of describing bowel movements associated with each phone number.

The phone can be your friend. Are there different musculoskeletal problems associated with

different areas?

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