

Dr. Seth Gordon, Hamptons pediatrician on the go

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August 21, 2007

A mother in Amagansett calls because her child keeps getting stomachaches. A father in Bridgehampton calls because his two daughters have earaches and mom is away. There's an asthma attack in Southampton and a rash in Sagaponac.

Balancing a map on his knees and taking a swig of Snapple, Dr. Seth Gordon reads a text message from parents worried about their son's fever. It's another afternoon in the office for Gordon, the roving pediatrician of the Hamptons.

This is an unusual doctor's office. Actually, it's a green Lexus sedan cruising amid perfectly trimmed hedgerows. The back seat is filled with baskets of antihistamines and boxes of medicine for fungal rash, along with blood test kits and a baby scale. Up front, Gordon answers a cell phone that constantly rings in about 20 different tones: one for regular patients and others for labs, radiologists, fellow doctors and unknown callers.

The opening notes of a Bach violin concerto signal a call from his wife, Heather, who has learned not to expect him for breakfast, lunch or dinner from Memorial Day till Labor Day.

Gordon, 33, is a throwback to generations of doctors who made house calls, although actually he often makes mansion calls. From 7 a.m. till 9 p.m., seven days a week in the summer, he crisscrosses Montauk Highway on the South Fork. He jokes that he is the most famous non-celebrity in the Hamptons, and that might be true. Moms wave from Range Rovers as they pass by; sniffing children bounce up and down when he arrives. As he drives up, maids, nannies, house managers and personal assistants open security gates and gargantuan front doors and greet him warmly.

Where the lice is

He is the keeper of the Hamptons' secrets. "I know what camp has head lice going around, and which one has fungus," he said.

For nine months of the year, Gordon has a practice in Manhattan. He and his wife have a second home in the Hamptons, and for several summers he treated his vacationing patients on weekends. Last summer, Heather was having difficulties getting pregnant and decided to recover from surgery in the Hamptons. Gordon decided to stay with her and make house calls all summer long, and soon he was logging a hundred miles a day.

He doesn't have an assistant in the Hamptons. First-time callers are surprised to reach the pediatrician himself, not a receptionist or an answering machine with six options.

Gordon figures the Hamptons population of children swells to 200,000 in the peak season, and at any time 10 percent of them - 20,000 - are suffering from fevers, rashes or tick bites. There are only two pediatric practices to deal with the crush, and they often are overwhelmed.

Without the wait

Just ask Michael Happel, who summers in Bridgehampton. At 8:30 a.m. Monday, he called a pediatrician to ask for an appointment for his daughters, 6 and 4, who had earaches. When he didn't hear back, he called Gordon. By the time Gordon arrived, at 1:30 p.m., the other pediatrician still hadn't called.

Gordon entered the house with an 80-year-old leather doctor's bag that he carries everywhere, and soon he was entertaining the girls with "the world's only Pooh-escape" - a stethoscope with a Winnie-the-Pooh character. He checked the girls and recommended decongestants. Happel paid the check-up fee of \$210 per child and said he was grateful.

Gordon didn't set out to be a pediatrician on the go. He wanted to be a tennis champion. He played tennis as an undergraduate at Yale, and spent summers giving lessons in the Hamptons. The logistics of getting from one private tennis court to another helped train him as a traveling doctor, he

said.

An only child who grew up in Manhattan, he spent his free time at a used toy store that his mother owned. There, he learned to quiet crying babies by doing tricks.

"He has good rapport with kids and families," said Dr. Robert Katz, who directs the residency program at Schneider Children's Hospital in New Hyde Park, where Gordon trained. "If you're making house calls and you're going on people's turf, you've got to earn their trust."

Katz is dubious about the economic model of a pediatrician who makes house calls. He said insurance companies have forced doctors who want to earn a good living to see a stream of patients in an office.

Gordon says insurers don't understand house calls' benefits: "Kids are intimidated by a doctor's office, and there's a greater comfort level at home."

Of course, his way of business isn't always efficient. "The doctor waiting for a patient - that's a twist," he said, idling in a driveway of a family that had gone to fetch their sick child at camp.

Doctoring at Starbucks

When patients have an emergency, Gordon meets them in unusual places, including the Bridgehampton Starbucks and a McDonald's in Manorville. Last summer, he rushed to the Sag Harbor pier when a mother called to say that her infant had fallen out of a stroller. The child was scared, but fine.

This year, Gordon will take a break shortly after Labor Day - because his wife is due for her labor day. She is "very pregnant," he reported with glee. Next month, the itinerant pediatrician will be getting a new patient: his own son.



All in a day's work for a doc

As he roves through the Hamptons in the summer, Dr. Seth Gordon treats seasonal illnesses and problems that he doesn't encounter as much the rest of the year. His top pediatric issues:

SWIMMER'S EAR

COXSACKIE Hand, foot and mouth disease, a viral infection that causes sores

CROUP A barking cough

ROSEOLA A mild illness caused by a virus

GASTROENTERITIS An upset stomach, with nausea and vomiting

OTHERS Injuries in and around trampolines, pools and bikes

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