

**Periodic Survey #62 – Issues Surrounding the Management of
and Referrals for Hospitalized Patients**

This survey was initiated by the Committee on Hospital Care (COHC) to assess pediatricians' practices regarding admitting, managing and referring for hospitalizations in local or regional community hospitals and academic medical centers, and to explore barriers to hospitalizations in these settings.

Findings from this survey will be used to develop educational programs to assist general pediatricians in addressing changes in pediatric hospitalizations and to inform policy discussions aimed at addressing the quality of care provided at local hospitals and referral centers.

The survey was an eight-page self-administered questionnaire sent to 2,088 nonretired U.S. members of the AAP. An original mailing and six follow-up mailings to contact nonrespondents were conducted from April through September 2005; 1017 questionnaires were received for an adjusted response rate of 49.1%. Analysis of questions on hospital admissions/referrals and services provided in community hospitals was limited to 653 pediatricians who have provided patient care in their office- or clinic-based ambulatory care setting for at least 1 year (68% of all respondents); analysis of questions regarding academic/referral medical centers was limited to 552 pediatricians or pediatric subspecialists who practice in or have admitting privileges to an academic/referral medical center (55% of all respondents).

Hospital Admissions

- Pediatricians report an average of 38 non-newborn patients were hospitalized during the 12 months prior to the survey; half of those patients were admitted to a community hospital.
- About half of pediatricians (48%) say the number of hospitalized patients admitted and managed in their local hospital has decreased in the past 5 years, while 43% say it has remained the same. About two-thirds of pediatricians say the number of their patients admitted and managed in academic referral centers (61%), or referred for admission to academic centers (66%) or local hospitals (62%) has not changed over the past 5 years.
- Four out of ten pediatricians (39%) say there is an informal system among the hospitals in their geographic area for regionalized care of pediatric inpatients (not including neonatal care); 17% say there is a formal system in place and 18% report no system of regionalization of care.

Community Hospitals

- 72% of pediatricians who practice in an office or clinic-based ambulatory care setting say there is designated pediatric-trained nursing staff available at their primary local or regional community hospital, and 66% report having a designated pediatric unit for exclusive use by pediatric patients.
- Fewer than half (47%) of pediatricians say there is at least one designated pediatric unit with pediatric medical subspecialty services available at their primary community hospital, and 41% say pediatric surgery services are also available. Thirty-five percent say surgery services are provided, but not by pediatric subspecialty surgeons.

Academic/Referral Medical Centers

- All pediatricians (99%) who practice in an office or clinic-based ambulatory care setting report referring or admitting patients to an academic/referral center in the 12 months prior to the survey, primarily because the patient required the advanced care available at such centers; 79% say they are satisfied with the inpatient services their patients receive at the pediatric academic/referral center.
- Among pediatricians who practice in or have admitting privileges to an academic/referral medical center, 35% report occasionally and 16% report frequently experiencing a shortage of pediatric hospital beds during the past year that required admissions to be delayed or patients to be sent to other hospitals.
- 63% of pediatricians practicing in an academic/referral medical center report an increase in the pediatric bed occupancy rate compared to 5 years ago.
- 26% of pediatricians practicing in an academic/referral medical center report patients' medical records are currently electronically accessible to referring physicians via the Internet and 21% say their institution is planning to make them available.
- 65% of academic/referral center pediatricians say there is a moderate level of communication between physicians at their academic/referral hospital and the primary care physicians who refer patients to their care; 17% say it is minimal and 15% say it is extensive. Half of academic/referral center pediatricians (50%) say the extent of such communication has not changed over the past 5 years.